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HIDDEN PERILS.

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A Novel.



By MARY CECIL HAY,

AUTHOR OF

"OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY," "VICTOR AND VANQUISHED," "THE SQUIRE'S
LEGACY," &c., &c.



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HIDDEN PERILS.

CHAPTER I.

A SOLITARY house, standing square and rigid in the deepening dusk of the March evening ; and, from one of its lower windows, the firelight struggling behind the glass to brighten a pair of wide young eyes which were peering in ; and to take for an instant, into its warm and pitiful embrace, a little chill form which pressed closely to the panes.

It was a wonder, too, that the firelight should care to struggle out in the darkness, when there were such comfortable quarters for it indoors.

So Lorraine Gaveston thought, as she gazed in upon the warm, well-furnished room, and felt how little she should care to leave it, if once she could effect a safe and secure entrance.

On a low chair before the fire, holding her white, idle hands between her face and the flame, sat a girl of sixteen, with a gentle, delicate face, bright fair hair, and a slight, graceful figure, womanly enough already to show that its growing days had passed. A very pretty picture Una Gaveston, sitting thus in her pleasant firelit sitting-room, would have made to any eyes ; but to those envious ones beyond the window-panes it was a picture full of exquisite beauty, and warmth, and happiness, and love.

With a passing vexation on her face, the little ~~watcher~~ drew hurriedly back when the ~~room~~ door was opened from without to admit a maid-servant, carrying in the tea. The child noted how her elder sister turned her head to speak, and she could guess how gentle and how kind the words would be ; then she waited, silent and motionless, until the maid had left the room

again. Would it be safe to venture now ?

Again the door was opened, and Una's governess entered, a pleasant-looking, grey-haired lady, whose first act was to lay a caressing hand on Una's cheek. The child started forward, as if the chilliness without had suddenly become unbearable to her, and tapped quickly on the window-pane. Una and Miss Shefford started back, alarmed for a moment ; then seeing the face at the low window, they let the child into the warmth, and light, and shelter.

"Where's the papa ?"

Though a timid, it was still rather a defiant whisper, and the listeners, in their astonishment, had not answered, when another knock at the room door caused the little new-comer such a panic of fear that, in a second, she was lost to sight, rolled in one of the long red curtains. Miss Shefford and Una gazed into each other's faces, puzzled and vexed, but did not speak until the servant had put down the lamp and left the room again. The moment the door was heard to close, Lorraine's troubled face looked out cautiously.

"Tell me quick, do, Una. Is the way safe for me ? Where is papa ?"

"Gone to Hohve to dine. He will be away all the evening," Miss Shefford answered ; while Una, laughing, yet almost crying too, caught her little sister in her arms and kissed her.

All the caution (which had never amounted to fear), all the unsatisfied longings (which had never amounted to jealousy), were gone from the child's face now. She danced about the room and cried, "Oh, joy ! oh, joy !"—and flung her arms around her sister's neck, and kissed the grave old lady, and won such an excited

brilliance in her eyes, that Miss Shefford caught herself wondering almost sadly at the difference which happiness could make in the child.

"But what does it all mean, Lorraine?" asked her sister, anxiously. "How did you come? What about Aunt Farrissey?"

"By train from London, and never mind about Aunt Farrissey," returned the child, impatiently. "I won't have her ugly old name mentioned. I'm come, that's quite enough for *you* to know, and to have to keep secret. May I have tea? Oh! Una, if I could always be with——"

The words were broken off abruptly, and the child shrank back, a sudden paleness overspreading her small gipsy face, for a footstep was advancing along the passage.

Una followed her with a smile. "Don't be startled, dear. It is Rourke Trenham, I expect. He generally comes here when papa goes to Holve to dine with Mrs. Trenham. It's a relief to him to get away."

"From his mother?" questioned Lorraine, without advancing.

"Well, she isn't his own mother, you know. Do you forget these things?"

"I forget *nothing*," was the emphatic answer.

Rourke Trenham heard it as he entered the room, and, tracing it to its source, gazed astonished at the muffled figure of the child still drawn back in the recess; and for the few moments that he did so her eyes were fixed upon him with deliberate inquisitiveness.

So they stood through those moments of their first meeting, and never through all the after years could one of them forget the thought which lay behind that gaze, nor could the other bear to recall it.

"I believe you two have really never met before," said Una, taking her little sister's hand; "but, Rourke, you surely know enough of Lorraine to need no introduction."

Miss Shefford turned away, smiling at the unaffected, old-fashioned speech of the girl of sixteen.

"Lorraine, is it? Oh! I know all about her. How do you do? You certainly look rather dishevelled and seedy,"

remarked Rourke, with a laugh in his eyes as he shook the small, cold hand, "but I hope you are pretty well."

Lorraine, coming forward to enjoy the fire, in a spirit of sudden friendliness informed him that she was as well as he could desire, and moreover that she had run away.

"Far?"

"Very far."

The conversation, though laconic, had given satisfaction so far. It seemed now the questioner's turn to be questioned. Lorraine looked up into his face with rather a puzzled scrutiny. "So you came here because it's a relief to get away from home. Don't you like your mother now?"

"Not a bit."

"I don't like her either. I remember her, though I never remember to have seen you. I never *did* see you. I should have remembered if I had."

"D'you think so?"

"I'm sure. Isn't it odd now to-night that I've run away home, and you've run away from home?"

"The oddest thing in the world, without exception; and how long do you intend to stay?"

"As long as I can keep hidden from papa."

"Oh, hush, Lorraine dear," cried Una, laying her fingers on her little sister's restless lips, "it sounds almost wicked; we must tell papa."

"If you do—" exclaimed the child, with a sweeping glance which took in every one, "but you *won't*. You are all friends to me, and papa isn't."

"That sounds rather curious," ruminated Rourke, as he placed Miss Shefford's chair for her; "and remember *I* have not promised not to tell."

"You don't look ill-natured," remarked Lorraine, once more studying his handsome, quizzical face, as she took her own place close to her sister. "You wouldn't tell, I *think*. But I shall be more comfortable if we make an agreement. Suppose you promise me not to tell, and I promise to do the next thing you ask me."

"A most tempting offer," mused Rourke, taking his own seat opposite Una, "and

not terms to be lightly rejected. I'll turn it over in my mind."

Silence of a few minutes, while they all sat in the full lamplight, enjoying their tea; then Lorraine broke this silence with solemn anxiety. "Have you turned it over enough in your mind by now?"

"Oh, I had forgotten," he answered, with a laugh; "I suppose we must come to terms."

"Thank you."

"But remember your own share in the transaction. Suppose I say, while I myself keep silent as the grave, 'Go and tell Mr. Gaveston yourself'? You promised to do the first thing I ask you, remember, and I'm thinking to ask that."

"I shouldn't do it," rejoined the child, promptly; "I should break my word, then; it wouldn't be *any* harm."

"Ah! Truth lives for you on debatable land, I see, and your worship depends on circumstances. How very convenient!"

A flame of scarlet darted across the child's face. Such a shamed consciousness of deserving the words, and such an angry resentment at hearing them from him, was the first foretaste of the pain which lay hidden for her among the shadows of the years to come.

Very slowly the smooth olive cheeks cooled again; very slowly the fire of anger died in the long, dark eyes. "It was a silly speech," she said, with the gravity of a woman; "one I picked up at school. I hate school. I pick up all kinds of silly things at school."

"Such as grammar and geography?" inquired Una, merrily.

"Yes, such as those," she answered, leaning her arms upon the table, and turning demurely to her governess. "Now, Miss Shefford, do you really consider that we grow any happier for knowing how to conjugate verbs, and things?"

"I think we should strive against being ignorant," replied the old lady, professionally.

"Do you? I think it is better to be ignorant than unhappy; and I don't believe one has time to prevent *both*. I'd rather be happy than wise, if I might."

"You think, with another wise head," said Rourke, "that—

"From ignorance our comfort flows,
The only wretched are the wise."

"Yes, that's just it; don't you hope you shall never be wise in what makes you wretched?"

"I haven't much fear, you atom of philosophy: but I think there's every chance for you."

"Oh, no," remarked Lorraine, thoughtfully; "I only go to school two hours in the morning; it's *soon* over; and I don't get any wisdom there."

"I hope you are unconsciously acquiring it all the while," put in Miss Shefford: "even at Hampton House."

"It is a funny kind of wisdom then," said Lorraine, raising her eyebrows.

"Will you pass that cake, Mr. Trenham?"

"Why don't you say Rourke, as Una does?"

"I don't know you well enough."

"How long will it take you to know me well enough?"

"You'll see."

And thinking, perhaps, that the first step towards such a knowledge was the strenuous use of her eyes, Lorraine sat still for a little time scrutinizing. A tall, well-made fellow of twenty years; his head set nobly on his shoulders, his movements easy and possessing a certain natural grace; his eyes laughingly, even mischievously, bright.

"They look something like wet violets," she fancied to herself, seeing nothing—child that she was—of the fierce passion which lay dormant there behind their happy, laughing gentleness.

And he, amused by her examination, even reading the evident approval of her gaze, began to criticise, in his turn, the uplifted gipsy face. He noted a pair of dark unsatisfied eyes, the whites of which had such a marvellous clearness that at times it made their brightness almost dazzling, while at other times it made their gentleness most touching. This peculiarity, and the straight, delicate brows above, gave them a wonderful look of purity and innocence. He noted that her lips, though not small, were curved and sensitive, exhibiting the white and even teeth, when they parted in a rare, quick smile; or twitching pitifully for a moment, and closing suddenly in a not less rare frown. He noted a

low forehead from which were pushed bunches of thick, soft hair, cut short like a boy's, and his eyes took in just these things and nothing more.

"A queer little party," he thought, lazily.

Upon this verdict the child's words fell.

"I am so enjoying myself," she said, leaving her tea untasted in her happy excitement; "you are, all of you, so nice; so different from Aunt Farrissey and Draco."

"Who in the name of all lunatic godfathers is Draco?" inquired Rourke, as he courteously waited on Miss Shefford and Una.

"Draco? Oh! our knight in waiting at Hampton House. He takes all his meals with us, sitting opposite me on a tall chair; dressed in nothing but a deep frilled collar; and he eats with his fingers, but has his cup handed to his lips by his body-servant, always in attendance behind his chair."

"Ye powers! cannot he help himself to fluid?"

"He could, perhaps, but he isn't to be trusted because of his collars."

"Just imagine it, Rourke," put in Una, gaily; "Draco is Aunt Farrissey's monkey, the ugliest creature you ever saw."

"I wish I had his photograph here to show you," said Lorraine, gravely; "but only one has been taken, and that Aunt Farrissey wears in a locket. I never was allowed a doll or pet of any kind," she continued, with a lingering regret in her merry voice, "because Aunt Farrissey says there's Draco for me to love."

"What an opportunity!" laughed Rourke. "So this handsome knight is your only companion, except the old character herself?"

"Yes."

"And what do you do all your life?"

"Play whist *nearly* always. When Aunt Farrissey and I are alone, we have in the butler and lady's-maid, and play all evening, Draco looking on; and when one visitor comes in—perhaps it may be Mr. Vere (for you know how she makes him come every month from here to prescribe for her)—she and I and he play with a dummy; we play for penny points, but our

counters are old five-guinea pieces; and when she has regular visitors, of course they all play together. I never go down then; I sit in my own room, and generally try a rubber with three dummies."

"The ruling passion strong in solitude," remarked Rourke; "you are rather a curious couple, I think."

"*That's* our life," said the child, a flash of anger in her eyes, as the delicate brow puckered for a moment above them. "Papa says it's very good for me, and that I must keep in favor with Aunt Farrissey. Oh! don't talk of her any more. Let's go to the fire again, and you tell us something funny."

Thus appealed to, naturally everything funny ought to have evacuated Rourke's brain on the instant; but he thought too lightly of the one from whom the demand came, and too confidently of the approval of the elder ones, to have a feeling so usual under the circumstances. Sitting beside Una, thoroughly at his ease—whether in total unconsciousness of self, or complacent self-confidence, Lorraine could not judge, though, as far as her small powers went, she exerted them to settle the matter with herself there and then—he told them comical stories of his past school life, and the adventures and misdemeanors of both himself and his school-fellows, drawing Lorraine and Miss Shefford in to tell their share of stories too. As for Una, she seemed to have none to tell.

"Una's doings have always been gentle and wise and good," said Rourke, when she made her first little failure of a narrative.

"Like you've just said of Athol Vere," replied Lorraine. "I think they are just a pair. Una, presently you must marry Athol. Miss Shefford, wouldn't that be a nice plan, and we'd go with them on their wedding tour." She was looking merrily now into the old lady's face, and so saw nothing of the dark red which flushed Rourke's cheeks, or the questioning of Una's blue eyes, as they shyly sought his face.

"Very nice," laughed the old lady, almost nervously, "except the arrangement of the tour. When Una goes, of course

you must come home to be Miss Gaveston."

"Come home *then*!" cried the child, with a sudden acute misery in her voice, as she turned and hid her face in her sister's dress. "Oh! Una, there's no home without you. Who cares for me in all the world but you? Una, you will never go away without me, will you?"

"I will never go away without your consent, dear," was Una's caressing answer; the words simple enough in their straightforward truthfulness, but destined to work themselves out with an awful, unguessed-of rigor.

"The child is wearied out," said Miss Shefford, rising. "This has been an exciting day for her. I will take her to bed, for I suppose we must not tell the servants of her arrival."

"Look here, Lorraine; shall I fetch Vere, with a cordial?" inquired Rourke, with a laugh, looking into her wet eyes, as she offered him her hand.

"Leave Mr. Vere alone," exclaimed the child pettishly. "I don't want to hear his name; he belongs to my *other* life."

"Physicians sore long time she bore," eh? Well, if you are determined to resist all my tempting offers, I can only resign myself and say good-night."

Then she looked long and slowly into his face, and spoke with that sudden change to gentleness in her eyes and on her lips which was so peculiar to her. "Mr. Vere is more polite to me always than you've been, and kinder, but I believe I'd rather do what you tell me than what he does."

"Brava!" cried Rourke, carelessly, "I'm proud to have rivalled Vere."

Then he turned to wish Una good-bye, with a manner and tone as gentle as had been Lorraine's to himself.

Very slowly he went towards home after he had left Rupert's Rest, walking listlessly along the turnpike road until he reached—the distance was not more than a mile—the tall iron gates of Hohve. Passing through a small one adjoining the outer lodge, he went on, still sauntering in the darkness, up the drive; a public way this was, and he met one or two people taking it to-night as a short cut from the

village of Kumley to the town of Atton. Rourke, though he could not recognize their faces, exchanged good-nights as they passed. When he had closed behind him the second gates, and left the second lodge in darkness, he stood a minute hesitating.

From here three drives diverged in different ways, cutting the park. The one which led directly to the house—its castellated towers standing dimly now against the sky—was the one he should have taken, as he knew; but he had no intention of doing so, in case he should encounter Mr. Gaveston on his return to Rupert's Rest. On the left, an unsheltered drive wound round the wide, silent sweep of park, and past the grey sheet of water, which, in its flickering movement, caught a sheen even now of almost silvery light. On the right, a broad gravel path led up the embankment, among the tall bare trees, between whose branches scattered stars looked down upon him, past the little church upon the height, down the slope again on the further side, and through the Loop to Winterfield.

This way Rourke took, but stopped at the wide oak gate which separated the Loop from the park. Beside this gate a lodge had been built, many years ago, by the Trenham who had cut this straight and direct drive from Hohve to the low-lying farm on which it was his delight to try all kinds of useless and expensive experiments—the last Trenham, it was said, who had cared to keep the farm in his own hands—and the cottage now lay picturesque and ivy-grown amid a cluster of gaunt firs. Except at this spot, the Loop could boast no umbrageous shelter. It all lay vaguely spread before Rourke's eyes now in the night, a huge field shaped like the figure 8, the drive crossing it at its narrowest part. Why it was called the Loop, Rourke never remembered to have heard. All he knew about it was that many of the dead and gone Trenhams had kept it for a private racing-ground, and that in his own father's time it had first been used for pasturage.

"When the estate is my own," thought Rourke, as he leaned idly on the gate, "I shall have this laid in lawn, as I intend to hold Winterfield in my own hands and see

what can be made of it. It's a capital old farm, rich land and profitable, I should think, if managed properly; rather a handsome old-fashioned place too, and I fancy altogether would repay great labor, if great labor could be bestowed upon it. I believe the tenants haven't done it justice lately. Well, I shall see what I can do when Hohve is mine. Of course it ought to be mine already—I managing for my stepmother, instead of my stepmother managing for me, or rather letting her mean-spirited steward take all authority from both of us—but never mind, he isn't worth worrying over. Let me see, I'll have rows of elms planted here, as in the home avenue, twenty feet from the drive on either side, and with the grass smooth and well kept."

Rourke, leisurely making his plans as he leaned there, whistled to himself idly the while. The sound must have entered the little ivy-covered cottage, for presently a woman opened the door, and peered out into the gloom, the light behind her clear and strong.

"Mr. Newley, is it you, sir?"

Of the sudden scorn upon Rourke's face as he turned it to the light, she caught a glimpse, and instantly repented her words.

"No, it is I, Miriam," he said in the cool, proud tone which he seemed to know there would be no mistaking; "what do you want with Newley?"

"I don't want him, sir," the woman answered, hurriedly; "I only thought, if it was him, I'd thank him for the drop of wine he sent me from the house."

"I will take your thanks to the house-keeper," Rourke said, with contemptuous carelessness. "What has Newley to do with my mother's wine? he is but a servant like the others."

"True, sir; true, sir," rejoined the woman, nervously; "only I thought it kind of Mr. Newley."

"Questionable kindness," muttered Rourke to himself as he turned his head away, the hot, passionate blood dyeing his face, "but it serves his purpose. These people sing his praises, and he knows my mother takes in every word with greediness. Why, Newley would as soon turn this old woman out homeless in the road

to-morrow as look at her. How dare he servant as he is, act with authority on my inheritance? I wish they could all know him as I know him. Great heavens! why was my father mad enough to leave all power unlimited in the hands of such a gilded weathercock as his second wife! There may well be a whisper about of a taint of insanity among us; it was certainly in that will of my father's, aye, ever so much stronger than in the old Trenhams who raced themselves here into fame. And here it is asserting itself in me when I see my father's widow let that toad Newley wind her round his slippery fingers. Bah! I will *not* let it worry me! How many hundreds of times have I said that? Let the snob enjoy his power here and his easy quarters while he can. He knows only too well that it doesn't last beyond his mistress's life. She is only spoiling him for other servitude: that's all the good she does her favorite. Everybody else hates him; why, how could they help it, the sneak? Even those with whom he works so hard to curry favor only fawn upon him for their own ends."

"Mr. Rourke"—Miriam had approached the gate cautiously and timidly—"don't ye let thoughts of Mr. Newley rouse your temper; he is not worth it, sir. Listen to an old woman that's always been for ye, and knows ye're her master, whoever rules here now; and don't let him bring such dreffel looks on yer bonny face. O! I do get so frightened sometimes when I'm thinking of you an' him."

"Nonsense," interrupted Rourke, laughing shortly and sarcastically, "you are half asleep, Miriam. Go in and take another glass of Newley's potent medicine; he's a rare physician for mind and body."

And so saying, he turned away, though not before he had let his bare brown hand rest a minute almost gently on Miriam's bare shoulder.

Avoiding, in a sudden new resolution the way he had chosen, he returned to the chief avenue and walked on, still slowly between the rows of grand old elms, to the principal entrance of the house. As he ascended the steps (the old house stood upon a height, and the steps were in short shall

low flights, each wide enough for a coach and four to have been driven up it) a young man met him, and stopped to speak.

"I was coming to look round for you," he said. The lights from the hall were falling full upon him, and they showed a man of five or six and twenty, of middle height, with well-formed, aquiline features and fair, pointed whiskers. They revealed the smile of affability upon his lips, showed the easy self-confidence within his light grey eyes, and the cool, practised gaze which had power to hide all but this confidence and affability.

"It is prayer time," Horton Newley said, "and Mrs. Trenham is waiting only for you."

The light fell fully now on both the young men, but neither was looking into the other's face.

"She need not have troubled herself to wait *only* for me," rejoined Rourke, aiming the fragment of his cigar into the mouth of an old cannon which stood beside the great stone portico. "She had her servants; they are generally all-sufficient for her."

"On the contrary," said Newley, with a slow tightening of his lips, which looked like a smile strangled in its birth, "she likes to have both yourself and me."

Rourke paused for a moment, literally aghast at the covert insolence of this speech, then sauntered on without answering. There were times when the cool impertinence of this man—professedly his mother's steward—failed to move him to anything but a lazy, dispassionate contempt.

But then there were other times.

From the great chill hall, Rourke entered the dining-room where his stepmother always conducted the ceremony of evening prayers, and where she sat now at the table, with her heavy Bible open before her, while she waited in fretful inaction for the two young men.

Rourke entered first, and advancing to the hearth, threw himself into an easy-chair and let his hands lie idly on its broad low arms. There was something in his whole bearing, as well as in this attitude, so carelessly, and indeed unconsciously, suggestive of the master of the house, that

Mrs. Trenham's eyes, after following him, turned a little deprecatingly to Horton Newley. He answered the look with the very slightest smile, the very slightest, yet withal one of perfect satisfaction. He had taken a seat apart from the servants entirely, but *not* entirely apart from Rourke, and he sat ready to listen in motionless reverence to the words of Holy Writ; his right palm supporting his left elbow, and his left palm supporting his chin, while his eyes were fixed attentively on Mrs. Trenham's face. A slight contrast, thought the servants—sitting in a row across the further end of the long room—to the young master, as he lay there almost at full length, his eyes closed; asleep, as likely as not.

CHAPTER II.

At the distance of about a mile and a half from Rupert's Rest, there stood an old farm, called "The Narroway," consisting of a low black-and-white gabled house, standing in a prim, old-fashioned garden, and three hundred acres of land, well looked after, and made to yield to the very utmost what it was capable of yielding under the vigilant eye of its master. A shrewd, practical farmer was Abram Bartle, never telling of the loss of a fatted beast or the failure of a crop; never confessing to have been taken in in the matter of a bargain, never grumbling at the weather, even in harvest-time; yet withal the simplest seeming yeoman in the shire, and to all appearance governed despotically by his acidulated housekeeper.

On the subjects of soil or stock there was no man's advice valued as old Bartle's was by Mr. Gaveston of Rupert's Rest, yet it was not often that his cold, reserved pride allowed him to seek it. There was no one who so thoroughly envied Bartle's quick knowledge as old Mr. Surle of Kumley Priory; yet nevertheless he cut him dead at fair or market, and stared stonily a mile ahead when Abram, in the presence of others, greeted him with a brisk little friendly nod.

"I like to see him," the old farmer used to say, with his suppressed chuckle; "ha

tries so hard to make me invisible. It's the only bit of pleasure I can get out of him, and he owes me that much for carrying off his sister."

For Abram Bartle was a widower, and this is the story of his married life.

The family at Kumley Priory, in the days when Bartle first came to settle at The Narrowway, consisted of a brother and two sisters; the brother, the present owner of the Priory, a grim, taciturn man, whose every thought and interest were centred in his purse; the elder sister—Abram's wife eventually—a high-spirited, obstinate girl, with her brother's nature lying hidden under her rather amusing frankness; and the younger sister, engaged then to Squire Trenham, of Hohve, a gentle, unsatisfied girl, with pure and high desires for her own life, destined never to work their own fulfilment. It would not make itself quite clear to Bartle, when he thought over his young days, how it happened that he and Anna Surle first fell in love (indeed, in these calm later days of his, he was sceptical in the matter of its having happened at all), though, as he always added, apologetically, "Poor Anna, she *was* handsome, and had a powerful mind, too." But, at any rate, they got into the habit of sending messengers to and fro between the Priory and the farm, bearing notes from one and presents from the other. But Digby Surle, waylaying a messenger one day, and finding upon him a three-cornered note, addressed, in his sister's hand, to Mr. Bartle, took immediate and rigid measures to ensure the impossibility of this occurring again. He threatened to dismiss any servant in his employ who went to The Narrowway; he forbade Anna to set foot on Abram Bartle's land, and at night he locked his sister in her room. But, in spite of all, she succeeded in despatching one more note to Abram: this was to the effect that he must come and rescue her at once, and have horses in readiness for their escape. He was there, horses and all, at the appointed time; and the steady, fearless young farmer, and the random and equally fearless girl, made such good use of their time and their steeds, that before Mr. Surle had missed his sister she was Mrs. Abram

Bartle, seated beside her lord in a post-chaise, rapidly approaching Dover.

No children crowned and blessed this marriage; but it was not until the birth of Rourke Trenham at Hohve that Abram knew how sore a disappointment this was to him. Rourke's mother died a few weeks after his birth, and then Abram pleaded—poor, simple fellow—to have the child sent to The Narrowway for a time to his wife. But his request was treated by the Squire with unmixed contempt; for Mr. Trenham, like Mr. Surle, had never spoken to Bartle since his marriage, and, beyond that, had seemed only too glad to drop gradually, with this excuse, the acquaintance of his wife's sister. Not much wonder, either, Abram thought, as each year he found her growing more selfish, more eccentric, and, worse than all, more given up to a certain immoderate indulgence he detested. Before they had been married five years, she demanded a separate establishment and allowance.

"Cannot be done," was her husband's calm rejoinder: "I'm a poor man; you knew it when you agreed to marry me, you knew it when you arranged to run away with me. We'll live apart if you like, there's plenty of room in the house, and I'll keep it up as long as I can work; but I'll keep no other. Do as you like entirely."

"Then I shall take all the upstairs rooms for my own use," said the wife, with business-like decision, "and stay here until you *do* allow me a separate maintenance."

So it was all arranged easily, and the husband and wife from that time lived apart in the farmhouse; he on the ground-floor, she on the upper one. Mrs. Judith Whinnipeg in close attendance on the mistress, and a juvenile maid (who suffered martyrdom at Judith's hands) in attendance on the master. The old demand was urged on all possible occasions, "Would he allow her income sufficient to support another establishment?" and the answer was always in substance what it had been at first—though there were some who said it was in pity to his intemperate wife that Mr. Bartle kept her with him.

Fifteen years of this kind of life made Abram a prematurely old man, but fifteen

years were all. Mrs. Bartle and Mr. Trenham of Hohve died within a few weeks of each other, and, it was said, from the same cause. Then Abram took a new lease of life. Not only was his home free from dissensions and disgrace, but he saw about it often now the boy he had selected to love, with a love so almost unaccountable.

After his father's death, Rourke Trenham, merrily defying his stepmother's wishes in the matter, appeared frequently at The Narrowway ; all the more frequently because Abram Bartle was never asked to enter Hohve. The farm was a pleasant place to Rourke, and his uncle's hearty welcome and honest affection were sweet to the lad's heart, though he could not yet guess half the riches of the man's warm love.

So Abram went on tilling and sowing and gathering into barns, yet always living in accordance with his own description of himself, "obliged to work hard to live."

Mrs. Whinnipeg had declined to leave The Narrowway after her mistress's death, transferring her fealty now to her erstwhile unacknowledged master. When Abram mildly suggested that, as she had been so much more accustomed to a mistress than a master, she might find the change disagree with her, she had grown pathetic to an alarming degree, and declared that if he had the heart to bid her turn her back on the home where "her poor dear mistress had lived and died," she should never look up again.

Bartle hurriedly withdrew his suggestion. Judith's back was not turned—save very occasionally—on the home where her "poor dear mistress lived and died;" and she emphatically *did* look up again, higher than ever now that she had a whole house under her supervision instead of half a one. Honest and faithful she was in her post, though she made the house miserable for everybody except the master. No servant could be prevailed upon to serve cheerfully under her ; but that signified little, for Judith herself did all that could be done, and there were laborers' wives living near who were glad enough to come and help at the farm, gossips of her own who never suffered from her sharp words. But there

were times when she made the master suffer too. Whenever he showed signs of hilarity, she swooped down upon him, reminding him, with lugubrious tartness, of the "poor dear mistress."

Abram used to chuckle a good deal over this depressing remark of Judith's, for her acidity always amused him until it was displayed towards either of his two favorites, Rourke Trenham or the little girl from Rupert's Rest ; consequently, of course, against these two Judith waged a sharp and jealous warfare.

Mr. Bartle, though an early riser, had not left his room on the morning after our story opens, when he was aware of unusual signs of life and motion beneath his window. He opened it a little way and listened. He knew the two voices that were arguing together, as well as he knew any voices in the world, but he only heard the end of the colloquy.

"Don't I tell you, Miss Lorraine, that you shall *not* set your muddy boots on that clean carpet cover in the parlor, nor on the stairs. I've only this morning put 'em down, and I won't see all my work spoiled. One might just as well have a ploughed field lying between here and the master's room."

"But look here, Mrs. Whinnipeg ; is it right for your Alderney—Buttercup, you know—to have broken her fence and be wandering away into the turnpike road ?"

"Right ! I should think not. Why couldn't you speak before ? Thomas is out of hearing now—sure to be ; and if I go myself, the master's ham is safe to burn. It's on the point of done already."

"You just go after Buttercup, Mrs. Whinnipeg, and I'll mind the ham ; don't you worry about it. Why, I expect I can cook splendidously."

The old man's head retreated from the window. He was chuckling with amusement over the tableau presented to his mind's eye, of his own new cook, and of Mrs. Judith Whinnipeg conscientiously rushing after Buttercup. Two minutes afterwards there came an impatient tap upon his door.

"Mr. Bartle, be quick, please," said a young eager voice. "I've only got a little

time, and I don't want to waste it without you, yet the ham may burn if I stay here."

Abram opened the door upon the child—turning her nose a little awry with the handle, by reason of her mouth having been closely applied to the key-hole to enforce the carriage of her words—and submitted with much composure to an impetuous kiss and caress.

"It's really you, is it, Gipsy? I'm ready, only let a poor fellow get into his coat respectably. Now then, *where* was Buttercup when you came?"

"In the field, Mr. Bartle, all right and safe with the other cows."

"And you told Judith she had broken her fence and gone wandering into the turnpike road?"

"Not *told* her so, corrected the child, with a grave shake of the head; "I only said, Is it right for the Alderney to be doing so and so?"

"And you don't call that an *truth*? Well, I must say, I do."

"Do you, Mr. Bartle?" questioned Lorraine, with a surprised inquiry in her eyes; "oh! I don't. It was only just a little plan to get to you."

"But no reasoning, and no reason for it, prevents a lie being a lie, Gipsy."

"Hush!" she whispered, clinging closer to his arm, "I wouldn't tell a—wouldn't tell *that*, oh! not for anything."

"You have a face that tells truth so plainly," Abram went on, as they entered the parlor together, "that if I were you I wouldn't try to tell anything else with my lips; and remember Truth has no unprincipled half-sister called by her name."

"I always remember after, Mr. Bartle," said Lorraine, gently, though illogically, "what you say to me."

"Surely not all the nonsense you and I talk together!" exclaimed Bartle, thinking the passing shadow had stayed quite long enough on the bright face. "Now, Gipsy, we are to breakfast together."

"Oh! but, Mr. Bartle, I really can only stay a very little time," she said, drawing his arm-chair to the table, her eyes restless and radiant again: "only time just to have a little talk. I must be home again before papa is up and about, or else——"

A light dawned upon Abram caught the ominous compression of child's lips. "Why, you don't me tell me you are at home unbeknownst to papa——"

"Oh! that ham," cried Lorraine, peering with suspicious promptitude. Bartle," she explained, regretfully, she presently returned with it, "it is *rather*; I wish Mrs. Whinnipeg hadn't down quite so early."

"Or that we hadn't taken it up *gu* late, eh? Gipsy, whose teaching is makes you so prompt to— But tell me said, checking himself, "whether you come away from your aunt in London of your own accord *only*."

"I'm vexed about this being burnt said, bending busily over the dish, the burnt slices crumbled into at the touch of the fork; "perhaps it taste very bad though, Mr. Bartle." surely, she thought, she had turned conversation adroitly.

Putting down his knife and fork, fixed his honest, quizzical eyes upon "Tell me what you came home for, whisper it if you like."

The serious lips went, not unwilling to the old man's cheek, dropped there, then hesitated.

"Well," began Abram, to make the confession the easier, "you came home for— I came home for—change of air."

The whisper was grave enough, but child's eyes danced with fun. He not be sure she had done it without confession, and he never would be unenough to take it for granted.

"I fear how it is," he said, in a tone, yet slipping one arm tenderly the slight restless form beside him. they angry with you at home?"

"How can they be angry when doesn't know? Una would *never* be with me. Only the worst of it is, Miss Shefford are frightened about the time, worrying like. They won any enjoyment out of me; they will themselves miserable thinking they to tell papa. It's not very much though," resumed the child, sagely cause he hates me to be here, or to be

from Aunt Farrissey, because she is to leave her money and everything to some of us, if she likes me—at least, papa thinks so. Mr. Bartle, I wonder why God didn't make *all* fathers good; because it would have been the same trouble for Him, and He must know how nice it would be for the children."

"Oh! papa's very fond of you," said Abram, with supreme confidence, though his hand fell an instant pityingly on the child's head.

"Fond of *me*! Oh! I wish he was! I'd give up everything else in the world, if he would be. I often think it would be enough happiness to last a year, if he'd only once look at me as he often and often looks at Una. Of course, I'm very different from Una; but I've seen a father in London quite as fond of his naughty, ugly child, as of his good, pretty one. You see, we are both papa's own children, and he might forget the difference between us, and love me just a little; I wouldn't ever ask for such love as he gives Una, only a little. But he never will care for me; nobody ever will but Una and—you, perhaps, Mr. Bartle."

"Ma, perhaps," replied Abram, drily. The child was close within his arms now, and could not see his face.

"Una often says," continued Lorraine, thoughtfully, "that it is best so. I don't *exactly* know what she means; but I expect, perhaps, she thinks if anybody loved me, it would make mischief or uncomfatableness. Do you think so, Mr. Bartle?"

"Highly probable; and in that case, of course, you are better without the love; so don't you go and give any away either, except that enormous quantity you offer up at Miss Una's shrine."

"But, Mr. Bartle, I love you a good deal too."

"I should hope so," exclaimed the old man, heartily; "and is that all?"

"I'm afraid so," replied the child regretfully; "only, Mr. Bartle, I want to ask you a question. You know Mr. Rourke Trenham, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Very well?"

"Very few know him better, Gipsy."

"Do you like him?"

"Yes."

"I thought you would," put in Lorraine, apparently relieved. "I'm very glad."

"Then I presume *you* like him too?" he asked, watching with amusement the gravity of the child's face.

"Well, you see, I never saw him till last night, because I've been away so much, and so has he. Yes, I like him—I like him *awfully*. I shouldn't mind marrying *him*."

"Your intention is to marry then?"

"Of course; all grown-up ladies do. Oh! Mr. Bartle, I see Mrs. Whinnipeg coming. Where shall I hide? She will so scold me."

"Never mind; you have stood it often enough for it not to kill you, Gipsy."

But, before the consolatory speech was ended, Abram was alone. Lorraine had disappeared, like the wind, through a door which led into the back premises, and Judith came on hastily up the front garden.

"I think, master," she said, bearing down upon him, terrible in her rigid wrath, "that you wouldn't encourage that child if you knew what a little sinner she is. She tells us untruths faster than truths, and she—I declare, master, you're laughing at her now. Don't imagine that I think it an insult to *me* for you to enjoy yourself because a baby-girl's encouraged to send me out of the house whenever she likes with her falsehoods. No; I am only sorry to see how soon we're forgotten when we're gone. There you are laughing fit to be heard in the high road, and the poor dear mistress's grave—"

"Oh! bless me, this tooth of mine!" exclaimed Bartle, dolorously, as he clapped his hand to his cheek. "Do keep that door shut, Judith, there's a good girl."

Two weapons poor Abram had learned to employ with more or less success against Judith. One was a sudden attack of the toothache to awaken her sympathy; the other was the delicate attention of addressing her as a "good girl," or a "dear girl." When both these weapons were brought into force at once, it betrayed an unusual weakness in the conscience of the assailed.

Judith felt constrained then to leave the room and close the door upon her master's

agony. When she returned, half an hour afterwards, to take away the breakfast things, the injury was still rankling.

"You've polished up the ham-dish as clean as if I'd washed it, master," she said, eyeing the article in question with a tart suspicion. "It must have been extra well cooked this morning, or you were extra hungry, or—"

"True, true," interrupted Abram, glancing nervously at a splendid old sheep-dog which lay before the fire placidly digesting it. "Yes, the ham was—very much enjoyed. Who rode round at the back a few minutes ago, Judith?"

"It was Mr. Trenham, he's putting up his horse now himself; I believe he does it on purpose to get his boots dirty before he comes in."

"Very likely," assented Abram, cheerfully. "Tell Mr. Trenham I'm waiting for him here."

Two minutes afterwards Rourke entered the parlor, his lips screwed into a whistle of grim interrogation.

"What's up this morning, Uncle Bart? The fair Judith is ruffled on the surface."

"Come to the fire, my lad, and I'll tell you," said Abram, rubbing his hands with quiet enjoyment, while his face was full of hearty welcome for Rourke. "It's a bit breezy in that quarter to-day, that's all; and the reason is—not a very large reason—because the little girl from Rupert's Rest has been here teasing her. Poor child! she's home without her father's knowledge, it seems."

"I know," put in Rourke, with lazy indifference.

"Well, she came off here this morning to see old Abry, and she ran out of that door when Judith appeared in the garden, and I reckon she's hiding about. Rourke, dear lad, you're younger and activer than the old man, will you help to find her? I can go myself to ordinary places, but it strikes me she won't go to ordinary places. She hasn't had a mouthful this morning, and I don't like to think of her hiding away half famished all day."

"I'll go certainly; I'll soon find her."

"I expect you will find her, Rourke, but

I don't know about the *soon*. It strikes me she's a match even for you."

"You'll see, Uncle Bart."

"Uncle Bart," echoed the old man, lingering over the name he had surreptitiously bribed his nephew to use when the young man was a child, and the interviews between them had been stolen. "Now it's a pity you've got into the way of saying that, dear lad; you'll have them all turn against you for it."

Rourke's easy laugh had a vast leaven of scorn in it.

"Turn against me! why, they are all at that particular angle now, if by all you mean my stepmother and old Surle!"

"Which is to say, your Uncle Digby," remarked Abram, his eyes twinkling, though he put a tone of rebuke into his voice. "Just let *him* hear you call me uncle so familiarly—almost affectionately, as I believe you would, dear lad—and see whether he doesn't cut you off with a shilling."

"If you mean in his will, I hope he will. I want him to leave the Priory to Athol Vere. Don't I inherit Hohve, uncle? the best estate in the county. What do I want with more?"

A shadow, quick as thought, passed over the old farmer's face. "True, true," he said (it was a word he always did say when he was at a loss for others); "let's leave inheritances alone; we don't know anything about them. Let's look at it in another light. If Mrs. Trenham and old Mr. Surle hear you talk of old Bartle of The Narrowway so, they'll think less than ever of both of ~~us~~."

Rourke threw back his head with a careless laugh. "I don't know which of us would mourn the deepest," he said. "Now shall I go and start my hare?"

"If you can find her. Yes, do at once, because at eleven Mr. Gaveston will be here to see the young horse. Things always do happen contrary in this way. He hasn't been at The Narrowway before for months, yet to-day of all days, because we particularly don't want to see him, he must have arranged to come."

"Why, you are as anxious for the child's escape as if you were a fellow-conspirator. Uncle Bart. Well, I will try to

safely off to Rupert's Rest without the parental eye falling upon her. I'm sure Una must be anxious."

Rourke was a good deal longer over his search than he had intended to be, but he was successful at last. Catching sight of a small dark object in a loose haystack, and following up the clue, he found it to be a half-buried head, crowned quite as thickly with dusty hay as with short, ruffled hair. From the warm grave from which this small object protruded, the figure attached to it rose as he sprang upon the stack, but rose with a difficulty which took much from the dignity which it strove to assume at sight of him.

"I say," began Rourke, offering a strong helping hand, "you are wanted in the house."

The child shrank back from him instantly, a baffled, hunted look in her eyes, her delicate brows drawn with a sudden fear.

"Not papa?"

"Not papa," returned Rourke, encouragingly, "though, by Jove, it soon may be. I'd almost forgotten that. Look here, Lorraine," he added, with a look almost of anxiety on his careless brown face. "Is it very important that you should not come across your father?"

"Most important," replied Lorraine, still keeping at a safe distance from him.

"And would Una rather I should take you home, or hide you safely here?"

"Una would detest you if you took me home, and she'd like you awfully if you hid me safely here."

"You are not inclined to exaggerate at all, are you?" questioned Rourke, while a real sympathy shone in his eyes. "Come from your lair, I will not betray you, poor little hare!"

"All right," said Lorraine, venturing forward without any further hesitation. "How are we to manage it now?"

"I think," cogitated Rourke, beginning to feel a shade of that deep seriousness of the child's which never entertained the possibility of his *not* feeling it, "that, as you are afraid of going indoors because of Judith, the loft would be the best place for you until Mr. Gaveston has left the coast clear for you to get back to Rupert's Rest.

In the mean time I will go there and set Una's mind at ease. What's the matter? How white and startled you look!"

"I—I didn't know that papa was coming here."

"Oh! don't be down-hearted," said Rourke, at a loss what consolation to offer under the peculiar circumstances. "You are hungry, I dare say; cheer up, I'll forage and bring you some provisions before I go."

"Are you going then?" asked Lorraine, wistfully; "won't you stay with me?"

Rourke smiled a little at the magnitude of the temptation held out to him, but he had not the heart to damp her while her eyes were so anxious in their excitement.

"I'll come again when I've seen Una," he said, "and tell you exactly what she says. Now, here we are. This is a capital hiding-place, because there are two ways out. If you hear any one put a ladder outside, you must get down into the barn below. If you hear them in the barn, you must spring from the window. It is not too high for you, is it?"

"Too high," laughed the child, as she looked down, "why it's nothing." Leaving her here, Rourke went on to the house to report, and to fetch her the promised lunch. When he returned with it, he threw himself down opposite her, finding a lazy enjoyment in watching and chatting with her.

Hundreds of times afterwards Lorraine Gaveston recalled that hour, wondering at the perfect bliss of it.

When he left her, she lay back with her head on her clasped hands, living the time over again. Only a few minutes seemed to have passed when a loud whisper from the barn below roused her. It was Rourke Trenham's voice speaking up the ladder.

"Lorraine, it is all up, I fear; your father is here, and has heard you are about the place. He must have heard it on his way; at any rate, he knew it when he came. Poor old Mr. Bartle is in a sad state! He is keeping back Mr. Gaveston in his search; but, unfortunately, Judith has instituted one on her own account. Now listen."

"I'm listening with all my might and

main," was the quick, muffled answer from above.

"When they are safely in here, I'll close the door and keep them in conversation before I let them come near the ladder. That's to give you those few minutes. Can you manage in that time to escape, and get out of sight on your way towards home? Una is there expecting you."

"I can do it."

"Don't be rash in your spring, but don't waste a moment. Start when you hear me say your own name. I'll take care it shall be loud enough to reach you, and that the door shall be shut at the time."

Standing ready for action, but drawing back from the chance of observation from either outlet, the child waited. She heard Rourke leave the building below, and some minutes afterwards re-enter it with others. She heard no sound of the door being closed, but she never for an instant doubted his having fulfilled his word. Presently Rourke spoke, in a tone a little raised.

"But, Mr. Gaveston, you surely don't imagine that Lorraine could be here!"

Without one second's pause, she gathered her dress about her with both hands, leaped from the narrow opening of the loft, and made for home with flying feet.

A soiled, weary, dishevelled figure indeed it was which entered Una's sitting-room and fell upon the rug.

"Lorraine!" exclaimed Miss Gaveston, starting to her feet, "where have you been? Where have you run from with no hat, and all this hay in your hair?"

"A little water, please, Una," whispered the child, faintly.

They brought her wine and bathed her face; and she was lying safe, as she fancied, on Una's bed, when Miss Shefford, hearing a rap at the door, started forward to prevent any servant entering. But she was to be taken by surprise. When she opened the door, Mr. Gaveston himself entered his daughter's chamber.

Is there any truer saying than that when the danger from which we have shrunk in nervous dread and cowardice meets us face to face at last, an unexpected courage comes? As her father advanced to the bed, Lor-

raine sat up and looked calmly into her face, her own most pale and quiet now.

"What am I to do, papa? must I go back at once, or may I stay a little—just a little time?"

Mr. Gaveston took out his watch and examined it coolly,—his daughter Una inherited his slow, graceful languor. "The London train leaves Atton in twenty minutes," he said; "mind you are ready to leave here in five; and if this ever occurs again, you shall be watched, as not fit to be trusted."

The child's desolate yearning eyes were still fixed wonderingly upon her father's face (a cold, handsome face, with drooping grey moustache and whiskers), and she spoke with hot and trembling lips.

"Even if I were good, you would not like me any better, papa, so what's the use of trying? If it made any difference, I believe I *could* be good. Oh! papa, would it make you like me any better? I would do anything to make you like me just a little as you like Una."

"This is not the sort of conduct to win you esteem, or even liking," said Mr. Gaveston, coldly, as he turned away. "In five minutes, recollect, you must be at the hall door."

"Don't cry, dear," said Una, when her father had left the room, "he does not mean anything unkind."

"Cry!" echoed Lorraine, with no sign on her cold sad face of the tears which had started when she first spoke to her father.

"I am not crying. Why should I cry? Bid me good-bye quickly, Una, I—I may be late. Una, you must lend me a hat, please."

A very hopeless good-bye it was, but still it had not brought the tears. Through the drive into Atton, and the journey to London, Lorraine sat beside her father almost motionless, and he hardly uttered a word to her until they reached Hampton House. Leaving the child in the hall, he went alone into the favorite sitting-room of his widowed sister; and was there many minutes before Lorraine was summoned. Trembling visibly in the dread of the punishment which awaited her, she came timidly forward, not even seeing Athol Vere as he sat

apart in one of the windows. But suddenly a great joy overpowered the child; Mrs. Farrissey was not going to scold her. In the happiness of this discovery, Lorraine saw nothing either of the gibe of Draco, or the rigid expression of Draco's mistress.

"Mind this, Lorraine," her aunt said, stiffly; "next time you get lost in the London streets, and a woman offers to take you home, remember home means here. Don't give your father's address again. I should never have expected you to be so clumsy. Making me so anxious too. Never do it again."

"Never," replied Lorraine, shaking her head brightly, and glancing for her father's approving recognition of her ready wisdom in so promptly endorsing his version of the matter; "no, I shall never do it again."

But even this repetition of the proof of her wisdom failed to elicit an answering smile. His eyes were on the ground, and remained so until she was told to go to her room, when he coldly bent to receive her kiss, and answer her good-bye.

"Lorraine!"

The voice that stopped her on the stairs was Athol Vere's.

"I came by the early train," he said, standing a few steps below her, so that their heads were nearly on a level, "and I am going back with your father, so I have only time for a word. You will find a hamper in your room, there's a little hen in it; you said you should like a little hen, and I've brought it from home."

"Oh! thank you, Athol," she said, her eyes full of bright gratitude, while her hand lay in his, warmly covered.

"What payment shall I have?" he asked, with a smile.

She had learnt to understand this smile, and her curved laughing lips were lifted a little towards his. Close and tight he folded his arms about the small figure, kissing her once, twice, three times. Then he whispered, while her cheek still rested against his, "Be good and brave and true, my pet—always my pet—and don't do this again. See to what mean subterfuges it degrades you—and others."

"How did you guess?" asked Lorraine, very low.

"I did not guess: I knew."

"Through my face?" she questioned, raising it wistfully for his inspection.

For all answer he stroked it gently with his hand, looking silently into her eyes.

"Try to be brave and true, my little pet," he whispered once again; and then he left her.

"I think," mused Lorraine to herself, as she walked on very slowly up the stairs, "that if Aunt Farrissey hadn't been always so particular in ordering me to like him, I should like him very much; he's very patient with me. He knows I like to be kissed now and then—the nows and the thens are a long way apart, because he comes so very seldom—as no one in the world kisses me when I haven't Una. Yes, he's very good to me. I wonder—" already the wayward thoughts have left him, whom, in her humility, she thought was *only* "patient" with her. "I wonder how Mr. Trenham would have said good-bye, if I had seen him at the very last. Would he have kissed me, and cared about my being good? I hope so."

Poor child! By this time Rourke would have forgotten her very existence, but for Una's anxiety about her, and Mr. Bartle's regrets that she had ever thought of coming to see the old man at all.

Just as Lorraine with perished fingers had unfastened the hamper she found in the small barely-furnished room which was called her school-room, a modest tap was heard upon the door, and there entered to her a rather awkward and excessively bashful-looking young maid-servant, with her cap on one side, and her eyes full of bewilderment.

"Please, miss, the mistress's maid has sent me to say I may as well help you, if I can. Can I?"

"What are you?" asked Lorraine, gravely, as she rose with promptness to examine this new maid. "I never saw you before."

"No, miss; I only came to-day. I'm an under-housemaid, named Joan—Joan Huddock, please."

Here was a new interest for Lorraine; something she could patronize and be kind to—perhaps even teach. A gladdening prospect for the solitary child, still on

which she felt it incumbent on herself to bear as yet with a serene and graceful dignity.

"Oh! you are Joan, are you?" she said, gliding at once into this highly appropriate manner. "Come and look here; this is my hen. Take it down and show it to all the servants, and tell them it came from close to my home. I'm forbidden to go into the kitchen, else I should like to take it myself. You'll like to do it; shan't you?"

Joan expressed a feeble anticipation of joy, and departed with her exhibition. Later on that day Lorraine was summoned to her aunt's presence, and told emphatically that the cook (who had evidently informed against the little hen) had received orders to kill it at once, and that she must never attempt to smuggle animals into the house. "Was there not Draco for a pet?"

Lorraine listened to the end of the lecture, then escaped again to her own room, and had a long and lonely fit of crying. She had grown calm again when Joan brought her solitary tea up to the school-room. While she watched the girl arranging it, a sudden thought struck her.

"Joan," she began, making an effort to gulp down the remnants of her distress in the new enjoyment of patronizing, "I dare say you don't have *very* much tea down stairs, do you? I dare say, now, you don't have any more pieces of bread and butter than those you've brought up for me."

Joan was dubious on this point, in consequence of never having yet partaken of a tea at Hampton House.

"So," continued Lorraine, circumstantially, "as cook has killed my little hen, we'll have it for a kind of supper. I'm always hungry when I go to bed; aren't you?"

Joan remarked that she believed there was always a supper prepared down stairs for the servants.

"Is there?" echoed Lorraine, astonished; "there never is for me. But to-night we'll have a feast; and a little talk, you see, will be pleasant. You cook the fowl here, all unknown to anybody, and have it ready at nine precisely; that's the time Aunt Farrissey sends me away when we're alone. Don't you forget."

Forget! If she could have forgotten task for even one minute in the in Joan would have considered herself py girl. That hen pressed itself upon her mind with the weight of a whole until nine P.M. had arrived, and I was standing at the head of the table, looking at the badly-cooked bird; while herself sat opposite, preternaturally and solemn under the dignity of her position.

"Say grace, Joan."

"Behold how good and how I it is——"

"Hush," interrupted Lorraine, though she had to command her silence with an effort; "that's a piece of grace. I will say it now, and please I will teach you things."

The consolation afforded by this prospect enabled Joan to comport herself bravely at the next unexpected question.

"Joan, what part shall I help you with? Make choice of a joint. If you say you care, it sounds silly."

"I'll take a neck if you please, now."

"A neck!" repeated the child, indignantly, "that's rather a thin joint, besides, there's only one neck; you say *the* neck; you want a good piece of teaching, I see, Joan. Do you know *anything*? Do you know——" The small girl had subsided into her chair now, after having deposited most part of the fowl upon Joan's plate, to keep the chosen piece of countenance, and a few mangled bones for her own. "Do you know, for instance, your Catechism, Joan?"

"I've learnt it, miss," rejoined Joan diffidently; "but I can't just say it. I'm troubled with a bad remembrance, and can't remember it. I never learned it. I learnt it by hearing."

"Don't you remember any of it as far as you can."

Pausing at frequent intervals for the consumption of chicken, Joan continued her entertainer with an entire reliance upon the Church Catechism, being encouraged and prompted hopefully now and then, until she broke down beyond all hope of recovery.

"You want a great deal of pra

that," said Lorraine demurely; "do you entirely forget the next bit?"

"I suppose I do, miss," said Joan, with anxious meditation; "less it's 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any grey nimmer,' or 'Thou shalt 'bey the Queen and all that are in a thorty over her.' Is it one of those, miss?"

"Neither, Joan," was the grave reply; "but never mind now, I will teach it you properly. You must always keep your eyes and ears open," continued the child, eyeing her companion in the light of a discovery, and unconsciously betraying the secret of her own education, "and always try to learn the text in church. Now can you remember what it was last Sunday?"

"Not just exactly, miss, the words," Joan confessed, regretfully, "but it was somewhere in St. Sam."

"I expect you mean in a Psalm, Joan," said her young instructress, pondering; "never mind, we'll learn all that presently, and then you'll like going to church all the better, shan't you?"

"Not less my bonnet gets trimmed up," said Joan, with honest sadness.

"It wants trimming, does it?" asked Lorraine, cheerfully; "well, you bring it to me, and I'll make it beautiful for you. I've lots of ribbons my sister gave me—oh! she's so pretty and nice—yes, I'll do it, Joan."

What a good evening this was! Here was occupation coming for the idle, willing hands; work coming for the restless brain. Poor little girl! in her groping she had seized one interest in her life's cramped way.

"I suppose I ought to teach you whist too," she said presently, having been herself taught to regard it as an essential occupation. "Did you ever play?"

"Is it with a comb and paper over it?" inquired Joan.

Lorraine's laugh, so fresh and real, was a sound most good to her in those dull rooms.

The next question in the examination list startled Joan almost as much.

"Where are all your relations, Joan?"

"I haven't got any," she answered, adopting an appropriately gloomy tone, a

tone highly suggestive of the caverns of Udolpho, "'cos they're gone."

"Dead, are they?" asked Lorraine, understanding the tone, and trying vainly to make her own as dismal. "How did they die?"

"Mother was a post, miss; up 'mong the hills at home," said Joan, cheering up during the narration, "and she was lost in the Jenniweather."

"Is that a certain kind of weather they have in the hills at home Joan?"

A rather lengthened explanation followed, during which Lorraine gleaned that the fact of her mother having been lost in January was what Joan wished to convey and upon the child's face there grew a sympathy which had been rarely called into play.

"And how did your father die, Joan?"

"Oh! he isn't dead—exactly," explained Joan pensively, as she tried to squeeze out a tear, which refused to appear on compulsion; "he lives a few miles out of Ireland."

Lorraine modestly explained that, unless a merman, he would find that difficult, if not impossible.

"I dare say it's odd, miss," Joan acknowledged; "but he was always odd. They say he promised to send money to pay for me in 'stalments annually once a month: and he let lots of 'stalments pass and didn't send, so they put me to service when I was quite little. They said he was my ill'git'mate father."

"I suppose that means not loving, and not caring to see you, and that sort of thing," said the child, musing, as she spoke, upon her own father. "Never mind, Joan; perhaps they—those sort of fathers—alter when you're grown up. Have you—would you like some more fowl, though I think it wants something flavory—like sauce or gravy, perhaps? Have you got a lover, Joan; somebody, I mean, that you intend to marry when you're big enough?"

Joan's bashful face reflected a little of the anxious gravity of her questioner's.

"Not yet, Miss Lorraine."

"Haven't you? Don't you think it would be very nice to have one? What sort now should you choose?"

"I should choose him—neat," said Joan,

rehearsing matters with solemn thoughtfulness, "and thin—and pale, with hair as black as ink, and never a single one out of its place, and——"

"I don't think that's necessary," said Lorraine, involuntarily interrupting that catalogue. "I've seen a gentleman whose hair was all loose, and I thought it looked very well indeed."

"But you'd have thought it looked better if you'd seen it flat down and shiny," maintained Joan, with an air of unlimited experience; "but I suppose he was nice in other ways, miss."

"In every way," was the emphatic answer, built on the child's slight knowledge of the young man of whom she spoke. "Now, Joan, I think I'll go to bed. All day to-morrow I shall trim your bonnet, then you'll have it for church next morning."

This anticipated Sunday morning found Joan in an almost dangerous state of suppressed excitement. The hours seemed interminable before she was allowed to go and prepare for church. It was Mrs. Farrissey's custom to let her maid dress her for church very early; and then she would sit at her drawing-room window watching the passers-by—she had had a scientific kind of archway cut in the laurels solely for this purpose—until her servants had filed past the window, and she had followed them with her keen and exacting eye. First in the line came the coachman, who had to hold the gate open, until his mistress, with Lorraine, had followed the procession at a stately distance; and, last in the line, the footman, who carried her books and fan and purse. The carriage horses—almost too fat now to have drawn anyone else's carriage—were left to doze the Sunday away in their stables.

Upon this Sunday morning Lorraine sat opposite her aunt in a state of exuberant excitement almost equal (though vicarious) to Joan's. An odd group it was; the rigid old lady in her stiff brocade, with the heavy feathers in her bonnet, and the glistening dyed hair dressed most elaborately round her lined and powdered face. The monkey on an ottoman beside her, holding a white handkerchief to his nose in mis-

chievous imitation of herself; and opposite—in the tasteless old-fashioned dress which Mrs. Farrissey affected for her—Lorraine, gazing with curious eyes into the old lady's face.

"Aunt Farrissey, are you papa's real sister?" she asked at last, without the slightest introduction.

"Of course I am, child."

"Then are you cousin to Mrs. Vere, like papa is?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You aren't a bit like her."

"I should hope not, indeed. She has no notion how to dress, and looks older by a dozen years than I do."

"Oh! good gra——"

The involuntary exclamation died suddenly, but Mrs. Farrissey swooped down ominously upon the utterer of it.

"What were you going to say, child?"

"I only—I only was going to say," amended the child, speaking coolly in the desperate emergency, "that a—a good grey is Mrs. Vere's favorite color."

"I dare say Poor girl! she never did know how to make herself passable."

"Girl!" echoed Lorraine, appreciating the relief from blame or punishment which her stratagem had given her. "Why, she's Mr. Vere's mother; and her hair is quite white."

"Yes, everyone would think her a great deal older than I am, wouldn't they?"

"Oh! a great deal," assented Lorraine, promptly; "your hair is so black; it's blacker than it used to be, Aunt Farrissey."

Fortunately for the reception of this last remark, Draco interrupted it with a demoniac reminder that the servants were passing. Lorraine watched the group eagerly, waiting for Joan, who came presently, bearing herself with lofty pride, yards and yards of Una Gaveston's soiled pink ribbon, formed into two gigantic rosettes, one on each side of her broad red face. As she slowly passed the window, blushing a deeper and deeper vermilion at every step, and glowing more and more with the consciousness of eliciting admiration in every quarter, Mrs. Farrissey rose and levelled her eyeglass more carefully.

In spite of all the preconceived ideas she

had formed of the decorous serenity necessary to do justice to her new position, in spite of her resolution to maintain a quiet demeanor, as if accustomed from her childhood to enormous pink rosettes, Joan felt the situation getting beyond her. A smile, born of overflowing satisfaction, worked on every shining feature, and her eyes literally watered in the vain effort to look unconscious.

"Lorraine," said Mrs. Farrissey, "fetch that girl in to me."

At the sound of hurrying footsteps on the gravel, Joan turned expectantly. Lorraine gave her message in a whisper, out of consideration for the girl's feelings. Joan answered back in a whisper, thinking the subject a solemn one.

"Back to the mistress? Then it's sure to be for her to see my bonnet close. She'll want you to do her one, miss."

The young housemaid, thinking this pleasing thought, entered the drawing-room in fluttering pride, and stood to bear her mistress' scrutiny with a serene self-approbation. She began to think the mistress was not going, after all, to tell her how she liked the bonnet, only to take the pattern. But the silence was broken at last.

"Go and take that fabric off your head. If you have not a decent, respectable bonnet to go to church in, stay at home."

The effect of this cold shower on Joan's radiant vain-glory was almost as depressing to Lorraine as to the proprietor of the fabric. True she did not go to her room weeping copiously as Joan did, but her slow and heavy tears were even the more pitiful of the two.

"If I thought you could encourage the girl in such vanity," said Mrs. Farrissey sternly to her little niece, "I would send you away."

The child's heart gave a great leap. Send her away! Send her home perhaps!

"I *did* encourage her, Aunt Farrissey," she said, instantly breaking the resolution she had made of hiding her share in the bonnet transaction. "I trimmed it for her myself, and told her it would just suit her. I encouraged her all I could. As you think it best to send me away——"

"You *ought* to be sent," was the stiff re-

joinder, "but I shall modify your punishment this time. When we return from church you will retire to your own room and spend the rest of the day alone there; and remember that from this moment I forbid you having anything to do with that girl."

The new employment was snatched from her; the new interest shattered by a touch. She stood again isolated in the cramped way which she had trodden, as it seemed, so long.

"Now, child, don't linger any longer," said Mrs. Farrissey, sweeping to the door; "is the man to hold the gate open all day for you?"

"Need I go, Aunt Farrissey?" she asked as she stood against the table, half turned away to hide the twitching of her lips. "I don't—I don't think I feel like church. I shall be remembering that I have got to come home to be punished, and—and I shan't listen or pray."

"Don't be so utterly childish. Follow me at once."

So the child, who was forbidden to be childish, did as she was told. Her eyes were dry enough now, burning with anger and rebellion, and she gave an angry poke at Draco as she passed him. Then, with an air of utter indifference to everything, she followed her aunt, really ashamed of having just confessed to a feeling which, like all other pure and natural feelings springing spontaneously within her, was made a subject of derision.

Just beyond the lawn gates she came up to her aunt. "Aunt Farrissey, there are one or two large grey hairs showing, just where you make Croft put the hair to be seen under your bonnet. I wish I could pull them out before we get into church, but of course I can't."

Croft was never nearer being dismissed than at that moment, and Lorraine had her revenge in witnessing her aunt's fidgettiness while she felt her "large grey hairs" would be visible from the pew behind. So uncomfortable she seemed that Lorraine relented presently, and tried to make the *amende honorable* by whispering that they had hidden themselves again, and that all the hair that showed was quite black now.

No change in her aunt's expression on receipt of these tidings gave her hope that her punishment would be mitigated, and it was not. The child spent the day alone in the school-room. Joan was forbidden ever again to go near her without orders; and at night she cried herself to sleep, as she had often done before, and was often and often to do again.

But one new thought afforded her a little consolation now. There was some one else in the house almost as desolate as herself. Joan had nobody to love, or talk to either. Joan would very likely be crying in bed now as she was.

Poor little girl! Perhaps it was just as well that—while she sat up in bed looking so yearningly out upon the blank grey sky—no one should tell her of the heartily-enjoyed supper which was then being partaken of by the young servant whom she had wrapped with herself in her gentle, wide, and wondering pity. And this is the last glimpse we take of the child in her childhood's home. When we see her again, seven years will have passed over her; and she will be nineteen.

The days varied but little through all the long seven years, but the loneliness of them deepened year by year. There were times when she was sent for home, for a day at a time, and there were times when her father brought Una to London to visit her aunt in ceremony, and there were the days when Athol Vere came from Kumley, and would snatch minutes from his exacting hostess to tell her all the scraps of home news which he had collected together for her especial benefit; but these were the only gleams of brightness which broke the long gloom in which we leave her.

Long, long letters she wrote to Una—they were almost like having her nearer, she said—and she begged for long ones back, because there was nothing of real happiness in all her days like reading Una's words; but Una's letters—though they always charmed her younger sister—were never long.

"She does not know how really solitary I am," Lorraine would sigh, holding the paper to her lips; "if she did, they would be longer; they are so soon read, so soon

learned, and then it is all over for long days."

And so the years passed, and it trod her solitary way; but not until we meet her again can we judge whether the teaching of that time has changed the nature of the child.

Still, though we leave our hero those seven years, we must pause just during their course, to glance at other characters of our story.

CHAPTER III.

BETWEEN Hohve and Kumley there is a low white house, separated from the high-road only by its dozen square of smooth turf, in which, in summer, two round beds of scarlet geraniums edged like a pair of passionate eyes; and a straight gravelled path cut exactly as it led directly from the low point to the glass door of the cottage. Till all the summer days it was the habit of the door to stand wide open, but it is an evening on which we first enter the Cottage (seldom receiving its name but designated "the cottage"), and the door is closed now against the cutting wind.

The train by which Athol Vere came from Gaveston travelled from London, a day after that on which our story had reached Atton early in the afternoon, but Athol had had several patients upon before he felt his day's work over. It was now the turret-clock at Hohve was ringing six as he walked rather tiredly to the closed glass door. For all the eight years of his life this cottage had been Athol's home. Here he had taken his father's place four years before, hoping all who had so highly valued the physician's attendance would be willing to transfer their patronage to his son. This the young man had studied to do ceaselessly all through his father's long and wearing illness. For this he denied himself all holidays and amusements, and went far on into the night in his father's room, roused every hour perhaps by his mother and sister slept undisturbed out of hearing. For this he would

hope and earnestness, until the time came when he was to test the success of the effort, and at four-and-twenty sue for the patronage of those who had admired and trusted his dead father.

It seemed as if he were to succeed; his promptness, his quiet gentleness, his thoughtful care, won their way; but suddenly, just as he had begun to count the time when he should be able to pay off the debts contracted during his father's lengthened illness, there fell the beginning of that anxiety which had weighed upon his young head ever since.

As we said, he won his way by care and straightforwardness and study; but there had not yet happened that one glorious opportunity (always wanting in the beginning of a doctor's career) of showing his power to the world, either through accident or skill, in one brilliant meteor-like flash. In the third year of his patient hard work, the chance that was needed fell shattered at his feet. The messenger who vainly sought him at the cottage was sent to Kumley station to stop him on his way to London. The man was too late, but the train which had taken Athol on, had deposited a stout, middle-aged, prosperous-looking gentleman, who carefully gleaned all particulars from the excited messenger; then, handing him his card, stepped with confidence into the carriage which had been sent for Athol. "Dr. Thorne, F.R.C.S." was on the card, and from that day Dr. Thorne was indeed a sore stumbling-block in the way of poor young Vere.

The patient whom he attended so promptly and unsummoned was a man of standing in the neighborhood; the attack was more alarming than dangerous, and by this one easy step Dr. Thorne, with success written plainly on his broad, sleek face, stepped over Athol's head. Under the auspices of his grateful and wealthy patron, the physician-adventurer settled in a pretentious house in Kumley, set up a stylish brougham, and, winning his way by storm, was soon to be met at aristocratic dinner-tables, from which Athol Vere, in spite of his connection with many of the county families, was excluded.

Many and many a time was Athol tempt-

ed to try a start in some fresh place, feeling how true it is that a prophet is without honor in his own country. But his mother's clinging love for the old home always kept him there, and he would again make up his mind—such a hard thing to do when much and varied advice is offered, and love and interest pull different ways—to work on as steadily and hopefully as he could, building his hope on the homely proverb, "God helps those who help themselves."

If he had had warm and sympathising hearts about him in his home this would have been far easier; but it was not so. His mother, gentle and loving though she was, fretted a good deal in her quiet, patient manner for the luxuries which had been within her reach until the last few years and doubly regretted them for her daughter.

"There are so many things to which Lucilla has been accustomed, and which she must miss sorely now," she would say. "I have always feared I should not rear her; I fear it doubly now."

At this Athol would smile, for (considering that Lucilla was close on thirty when her mother took to this plaint, and was quite exceptionally healthy) there was not any pressing cause of fear in that direction; and he would say, in his pleasant way, that Lucilla always looked very well. But he felt the stab nevertheless, as keenly as if he had resented it. Then Lucilla's own grievance would start up. "Athol, if you had any spirit you would take a handsome, imposing house and set up your carriage. If we all went about as if we were grand and rich, you would soon have a crowd of patients besieging your door."

"Or a crowd of duns," Athol would answer, smiling. "No, let us pay our way as we go, whatever we do, or we shall never know where our difficulties stop."

"That's intended as a hint for me, I know," she would answer, carelessly, "because I have a few necessary bills. I wonder who could help that, having as little money as I have."

"Are you in debt now, Lucy? Would you like a little money?"

"I should like a little money," would be the light answer to the earnest question, "but of course I must be in debt."

And this was an old story now, and Lucilla never thought where it might end.

"I think, Athol," his mother would say, with a rather doubtful thoughtfulness, "you must marry; a married doctor always succeeds better than a single one, and we could all live here together. I could not leave the cottage now, nor part from you, dear."

But Athol never let this be discussed. He could not marry for many years, he sometimes answered; but that was all he ever said on that one subject.

Mrs. Vere sat alone in the room which Athol entered. She had a delicate, patient face, framed in bands of snow-white hair, and she was dressed (as pretty and fair old ladies should be dressed) in grey, with the glistening of a softly-bright-hued ribbon among the laces of her cap. Quite an old lady, for the children whom she had had with her were the youngest, as well as the only two now living, of a family of eight. The room in which she sat was warm and bright, but there was no meal upon the table waiting for Athol, though he had eaten nothing since his eleven-o'clock breakfast with Mrs. Farrissey.

"Here I am, mother," he said, stooping to kiss her. "Are you better?"

"Yes, dear. How late you are! and tired, I'm sure. We shall have tea presently, but Lucilla wanted Sarah to help her to dress, so we must wait."

"Where is Lucy going?"

"To the Priory, to dine with Mr. Surle."

"How continually she goes there, mother! I wish she would not."

"My dear, you surely would not deny your sister any little pleasure she may fancy; that would be very hard."

"But she is so seldom invited, yet goes so often," said Athol, as he sat down opposite to his mother.

"She says Mr. Surle is always glad to see her; as he would be, of course: she is so cheerful, and she is his godchild too; you *know* she ought to go when she can, don't you, Athol?"

"No, mother; *because* I know her reason for going."

"I think you are always a little unjust

about this, dear; but never mind it to-night. You look depressed—are you?"

She was looking into his thoughtful, delicate face, and involuntarily a wish rose to her lips.

"Ah, my dear, I would give anything if you were as healthy and strong-looking as Rourke Trenham."

Athol rose with a laugh that hid all thought. "You might just as well wish I were as rich, and as—as free from care, my mother."

And, short-sighted in her love, she wished that too.

Just as Athol rose from his seat and turned with his back to the fire, his sister entered the room. We have said that Lucilla Vere was nearly thirty, but she did not look that by five or six years, when she came in then, dressed to dine at The Priory.

Whether she would look five or six years older in the morning, when the false color was gone, and the pitiless daylight laid bare all trickery, need not be proved. Lucilla looked, as she herself called it, "effective." Her transparent white dress was made and trimmed, not following blindly the fashion of the day but just as it should best show off to advantage her figure and complexion; and in this Lucilla betrayed her skill in the very primary branch of a woman's toilette. But when that is said we can add no more; we can only remember in her favor that she felt her youth going from her, and was anxious to use every power she possessed to hold it back. Perhaps if she had let it go, and followed it with bright and modest steps, her face might have been even more than pleasant to look upon; but it was far less so now by reason of the effort she made to hang out still the ensigns of her lost youth, and by reason too of the hunger within her eyes for something which life had not given her. Holding the long train of her dress about her, she came up to Athol while he looked into her face with unconscious scrutiny.

"Well, Athol, I'm glad you are come. Tea will be in in a few minutes. I want cup myself before I go. Have you come straight from London? I want to hear

the exact truth of this ridiculous story of Lorraine Gaveston's running away."

Athol told the story in a few words, while his sister moved up to the glass, and satisfied herself about the faultless arrangement of the two curves of hair which were gummed to her temples; uttering a *yes* and an *indeed* every now and then, in that perfectly uninterested tone which is so maddening to a narrator.

"It would serve her right if she were never allowed to come home again, the deceitful little thing! Mamma, I have borrowed your fan, you see."

"I see, dear," responded Mrs. Vere, glancing proudly at her daughter. "You look very nice; doesn't she, Athol?"

"Isn't it rather too much of a good thing?" asked the young man, quietly.

"I mean, of course, for our position; especially as there will be no one at the Priory but your own cousins."

"Well, they are the very people before whom I cannot bear to look shabby," returned Lucilla. "You know how nice Una always looks, and Mr. Gaveston is a quizz, I'm sure."

"I don't believe Mr. Gaveston ever knows what dress a woman wears," said Athol, "not even his own daughter; and I do wish with all my heart, Lucy, that you would not dress to such an extent. Do you know I think they must often laugh at you, those two old men."

At that moment Lucilla had no need of her rouge.

"You always delight in saying unkind things to me, Athol," she said. "You know that Mr. Surle is really fond of me, and I suppose you are jealous because he asks me to go."

"I would not say a word in complaint, if you only went when he asked you, Lucy; but you go forever. Nor would I say a word if you went because you *liked* him."

Lucilla smiled a smile that had more of honesty in it than had any smile she wore through the night afterwards.

"Of course, I don't really like him. Why nobody could: but that's a secret among us. The fact is, I must and will try to make him leave me some, at least, of his spare money. Think how poor

we are, Athol; and you cannot tell me any real harm there is in trying. He is always gracious with me, and I believe he *means* to do it. I can see he likes me better than Una; and he actually dislikes you and Rourke, you know."

"Still Rourke is his nephew, and you are no relative at all."

"But bless me, Athol, how stupid you seem! Doesn't a godchild always come before a relative in the matter of inheriting money?"

"I don't know," responded Athol shortly; "I suppose we shall see some day."

Just then the tea was brought in, and Lucilla poured herself out a cup as she stood—it would never have done to crease the dress before starting.

"Now, Athol, you must preside, and help yourself and mamma," she said, as she finished. "I'm sorry not to have had time to do it. I hope you won't want anything while Sarah is walking with me. I will send her quickly back. Good-bye."

Mrs. Vere's eyes proudly followed her daughter's receding form.

"Athol!" she said, simply, when they were alone, "what a nice thing it would be if Howard Gaveston should take a fancy to Lucy! She would make a suitable mistress for Rupert's Rest. Una is sure to marry, and then he will want a lady in his house."

"Mr. Gaveston has a daughter besides Una," said Athol as he began to butter his mother's toast, too listless or too tired, apparently, to enjoy the meal now it was before him.

"Yes, but I do not fancy she will ever live at home. He seems to have a dislike to the child."

"Or it serves his purpose to keep her at Hampton House until his sister dies, and her will is read."

"I fear she is not happy there, Athol."

But Athol was cutting the toast, and perhaps did not hear this question.

"You will read to me after tea, won't you, dear?" she asked, when he had brought her tea to the little table beside her chair.

"I wish Sarah could have stayed at home to wait on you," she added, when he had answered her; "I'm sure you ought to

have had something cooked for your tea, to be warm and comfortable after your day's work ; but then Lucy could not go alone, of course."

"All right, mother. I have had all I needed. Tell me when you are ready for the reading."

Miss Vere reached The Priory a full half-hour before Mr. Gaveston and Una, though they came with a pair of horses, and she walking with the maid. But to gain this half-hour Lucilla had made her calculations, and now was improving it to the best of her ability ; sitting at her ease in the sombre, heavily-furnished drawing-room, while her godfather walked to and fro before the wood fire, glancing sometimes impatiently at his watch, and sometimes with covert scrutiny into his companion's face. There was no secret in her possession, either belonging to her own house or the houses of others, which she would not willingly have divulged for his amusement, and she had good reason to fancy herself successful, when she heard the short chuckle with which he now and then interrupted her narratives.

"It is time those two were here," he said, at last, stopping before the bell ; "I will have dinner served. It's nearly four minutes past the hour, and we've no one else to wait for. I did not ask Rourke Trenham. I never ask him when Gaveston brings his daughter."

"I think I have noticed it," remarked Lucilla, innocently. "Why is it?"

"Because he likes to come then, and so does the girl. For that reason I never let them come together."

Miss Vere laughed merrily, at this good-natured jest, and the old man watched her, while he gave the bell a short sharp pull.

"If I thought you liked to come because anyone else came, I'd never ask you except when I was alone."

"But that's just when I like to come, godpapa," the girl said naively. "It is only you I ever care to see ; you know that, don't you?"

"Trenham is an obstinate, random fellow," continued the old man, curtly disregarding her question : "he never heeds the

value of money, and" (damnatory clause) "he is friendly with old Bartle."

Lucilla sighed. "One needs to be poor to learn the value of money," she said.

"You know it, eh?" inquired her sponsor, letting his keen glance rest a moment on her dress.

"I do know it indeed. I have learned it by a rather hard experience, though I have learned too, godpapa, to make the very most of what money I have."

"That's right. Good lessons for you. Now we'll go to dinner." But the hospitable plan was frustrated. Mr. Gaveston and Una arrived (luckily for themselves) at that very instant, and Lucilla's hand was, to her great joy, transferred to Mr. Gaveston's arm. The meals at The Priory were by no means renowned for being either sociable or jovial ones, and this dinner formed no exception to the general rule ; but for all that, the four guests got on pretty well together. Old Digby Surle and Mr. Gaveston had many interests in common, and however grim the one might be, and chill the other, these interests could be discussed easily and comfortably at the well-spread table. Then Una's pretty, gentle face and manner lent their brightening influence, and Lucilla's efforts at making herself particularly agreeable and attractive were not without reward. But in her search for matter wherewith to entertain her companions she made one rather unfortunate hit, and an ominous frown gathered on Mr. Gaveston's face as she began merrily to discuss the flight from London of his little daughter.

"What's that—what's that?" questioned old Digby, with his eyes keen and intent. "Tell me the whole tale."

And Lucilla, glad to be appealed to, repeated all that her brother had told her of Lorraine's desertion and capture.

"Lorraine will never do it again," put in Una, with the gentle grown-up-ness which was peculiar to her. "She is but a little one after all."

"A little one, eh!" echoed Digby, with his shrewdest chuckle. "Then all I can say is, if *she's* one of the little ones, of such isn't the kingdom of Heaven. Ha, ha!"

"Come, Surle, that's enough about the

child," said Mr. Gaveston, icily. "Let her alone."

"Yes, yes, certainly," rejoined the old man, with prompt cordiality, "that's just the thing for her. I agree with you heartily in your system, Gaveston. Yes, *let her alone.*"

Miss Vere began to feel herself a little at fault, and fancied she had led the conversation somehow astray. With a spasmodic liveliness, she veered to another subject, and doubly exerted herself to be diverting until it was time to retire. Una, being so much her junior, always left her to take the lead at The Priory.

When the evening had worn itself away, when Una had suppressed a dozen yawns, and Lucilla had exhausted all her fund of amusing narrative and repartee, the butler came in to say that Robert, from the Cottage, had come for Miss Vere.

Lucilla flushed angrily at the thought of the boy having been sent to walk with her.

"Drive with us, Lucilla, if you like," said Mr. Gaveston, seeing this; "our carriage is waiting. Let your man be sent back."

"Oh! *thank* you," she exclaimed, throwing half the impressiveness she possessed into that "thank you" and the other half into her adieu to her godfather.

Rupert's Rest stood nearer to The Priory than did the Cottage, so Mr. Gaveston and his daughter stopped there, and sent the carriage on with Lucilla. Half lying on the cushions, with her dress spread around her, Lucilla gave herself up luxuriously to her ambitious dreams, and the drive of a mile seemed to take just one minute.

"At any rate," she was saying to herself, when the carriage drew up before the gate of the diminutive lawn, "it is no harm to try. Every girl does it. Every girl wishes to be well off, and to marry."

The shutter was not put up on the glass door of the cottage, and Lucilla wondered at this, because she was unusually late in her return. As she stood knocking, and looking into the little lighted hall, she saw her brother coming down the stairs, in his loose house-coat, and with a worried, anxious look upon his face.

"Why did you send Robert for me,

Athol?" she began, as soon as he had opened the door to her.

"Mother was too poorly for me to venture to leave her, and, of course, I would not send a girl like Sarah in the darkness walking to Kumley. Lucy, did you know there was no brandy in the house? I wish you would see to these things in a morning, when you say you are about your housekeeping. This sort of thing occurs so often, and might have such serious consequences. Mother had one of her bad attacks, and you know there is no house near here to which I could send in a hurry."

"Poor fellow! what did you do?" asked Lucilla, stifling a yawn, as she took up her candle. "You must keep a horse, then you won't be so bothered."

But to that question like the other, Lucilla waited for no answer. She swept up the stairs and entered her mother's room, approaching her bed softly, though she had to do battle with another yawn while she kissed her.

"Better, are you, mother?—that's right. Mind you get a good night's sleep. Yes, I've enjoyed myself, thank you. Kind? Oh, yes; they were very kind. I do believe, mother, that my old godfather really means to leave me rich; he hints it always. Won't it be nice for us to be rich?"

"For you, dear, and Athol. It is a happy thought for me that you may be so."

"Oh! all of us, I mean. Una had on such a lovely silk, mamma, of the very palest blue."

"That would suit her fair hair and delicate skin. Lucy, I've been thinking that that puce silk of mine, with alterations, would make you a beautiful——"

"Don't talk any more, mother: you look quite faint. Where's Athol?"

Athol entered the room almost as she spoke. "I am going to sit here for an hour or two," he said. "If mother does not sleep, I will mix her a draught. You go to bed, Lucy: you are tired, I'm sure."

"Very. Good night."

But before she reached her own room she turned aside and paid a visit to the old wardrobe, in which lay her mother's puce silk. She drew it from its hid-

ing-place and examined it critically, then put it back with a sigh.

It might do, and look very well; but it would take a lot of money to have it properly re-made and trimmed, and I fear Athol won't give it me. I must try him."

Sitting before her glass, she studied her face intently for a time. This was always a custom of hers before she began to undress, and was performed in much the same spirit as that in which old Digby Surle went through his banking account in the solitude of his grim old library; or Horton Newley, in his own room in the west wing at Hohve, sat down most nights to look his chances in the face.

"I don't look twenty-nine," she mused: "I never look my age when I'm properly dressed. I shouldn't a bit mind *ever* doing so if I were married. Why does a married woman seem so young at thirty, and a single one so old?" She had taken off the high transparent body, and laid bare the powder on her neck and arms. "What credit is there in doing nothing to help your appearance if you are such a girl as Una Gaveston? What credit for such as she?"

And in that unanswered question lies an excuse which is broad and real, however vain and selfish. While Lucilla calmly slept and dreamed of possible conquests, the night-light burned dimly, as night-lights will, in her mother's room, trying to stretch its small pale light to Athol's face. It had no need to try to rouse him; he was alert and watchful enough, and presently he rose and mixed the sleeping draught.

"It will be better to take it, mother," he said, as he brought it to her. "A night's rest will do you untold good."

"Then you will go to rest yourself, dear," she whispered. "I'm glad you let Lucy go to bed; she was tired, and you are stronger, though younger. Take care of Lucy always; but you always will, I know. Let me have another kiss before I sleep. I love you so, my child—as no one else can ever love you, Athol. Tell me that you are sure of this, and that the love of no one else will ever be so dear to you."

"The love of no one else will ever be

the same—not ever," he answered; and the fragile light could not reach his face, then within the curtains, to show its pallor.

"Not ever," she echoed, gently satisfied, "though I hope you will marry, dear—and soon."

"Not soon," he answered, trying to speak brightly, as he held the glass to her lips; "but I will marry, mother, if—if I can."

"That's right. Now I will drink it, and sleep."

And she did sleep, calmly and peacefully; while Athol sat before the fire which he himself had lighted in her room, hardly moving through the night, though at heart he was restless and ill at ease.

Mrs. Vere never left her bed again, though she lingered many weeks; and through this time Athol always found time to sit with her and cheer her when she longed for him; and was always ready to sit up with her at night, however busy his day had been; while he always brought bright, loving words and smiles to her bedside, however heavily his heart might be oppressed, and however wearing his day's work might have been.

Even Lucilla did not go often from home through that time; and—as Athol prayed she might be—she was with her mother at the end.

CHAPTER IV.

FIVE years had passed since Mrs. Vere's death, and Athol's was still but a struggling career.

It is hard to say how different it might have been if Dr. Thorne's bland whisper of pity and sympathy (from his lips a deadlier condemnation than blame) had not found ears so ready to receive them; or if the young physician had had prudent management in his own home. There were times when he argued and pleaded with his sisters to be more careful and economical, and not let the bills accumulate (bills she could not bear him to look over); but such appeals were of little avail, and all he could do was to make his resolution stronger than it had ever been before; to study hard, work with deep care, and trust the rest to God without complaint or discontent.

"When a lumbering carriage and pair pokes up a narrow lane, one wheel in each edge, how is a fellow to pass on his cob, however much better and activer he may be? That's what I should like you to explain to me."

But Rourke Trenham, to whom Mr. Bartle addressed this observation, had no explanation to offer, only his own comments to make. "If the fat brougham represents our suave friend Thorne, I expect it will be all right, uncle. Give the cob time, and you will see. There's no credit in a man's making his way alone along an open turnpike road; the credit is in passing a stout rival in an up-hill lane. Give Vere time. He's of the stuff that wins success at last, because he is *thorough* in all he does, and says, and thinks."

"Yes; he is a clever fellow, Rourke," was Bartle's hearty answer, "and I would trust him with the life I hold most precious."

"Your own, uncle?"

"Never mind, my lad. At any rate, it isn't Judith's."

The farmer on foot, and his nephew on horseback, had met at a gate between The Narrowway meadows and the road, and while they lingered chatting, the sight of Athol Vere advancing towards them from the distance had turned their conversation to him.

"It is rather humiliating to think," mused Rourke, "how entirely and helplessly our lives are sometimes placed in our physician's hands; but I could never fear mine being in *his* hands; and—as you say—I could trust him with the life I hold most precious."

Rourke said it lightly enough; for what shadow from the future could dim, for a moment, the brightness of that autumn morning?

"Vere looks as if he were making directly for the farm," he continued, presently. "Are you expecting him, Uncle Bart?"

"True, true, he does," said the old man turning the matter aside rather nervously, as he watched Athol cross a stile above, and hurry down to join them. "I'll tell you what it is, Rourke," he added, as a

brilliant idea entered his head; "he saw you here, and he's come to wish you many happy returns of the day. Young squires don't keep their twenty-fifth birthday every year; do they my lad?"

"Well, it's not usual," assented Rourke; but he wondered at the old man's haste in greeting Athol, and knew it was to cut off some question he expected.

"Glad to see you, doctor. It's breezy indoors this morning, and I turned out for a change—found it too, didn't I? It's always the best change for old Abry to have young faces and young forms about him."

"Many happy returns of the day, Trenham," said Athol, hopeless of a handshake when he saw how it required all Rourke's strength and skill to hold in his horse during the interview. "Another vixen, eh? How many times did she throw you before you mastered her?"

"A dozen at least; harmless pitching enough, you may imagine, when I tell you the most serious was a toss into a hayrick. Going in head first of course made the coming out awkward, that's all."

"Do you buy up all the untrained or untrainable animals in the country, just for the purpose of practising your skill upon them? We must all own, I suppose, that you do thoroughly understand how to manage a horse?"

"He does it to frighten his mother," said Bartle, with a twinkle in his eyes.

Rourke laughed heartily. "Given a fellow without a mother at all, and a substitute who is a regular Spartan in the matter of being as willing he should come home on his shield as bearing it, yours is a problem, uncle. No, Vere; it is something to master that requires an effort, that's the real secret of the matter, I believe. Most things one has to do are so terribly cut and dried and prepared. I can better value a thing I succeed in doing, or winning if I have had a lot of trouble over it, and had to exercise every grain of sense I possess. For instance, fancy such a hunting morning as this, and no fence or ditch in one's way! How sickeningly tame! She's hard enough to manage," he added, bending in his saddle to stroke the sleek,

brown neck of his hunter, "and I like her all the better for it."

"That's always been a recommendation with him, save in one case," said Bartle, looking with a quizzical smile into the handsome face on which a frown was gathering sternly now, as Rourke tried to keep the hunter still under Athol's touch, "that'll be his wife. Rourke won't look for much rebellion in her; will you, dear lad?"

"I shall hope for just the opposite in my wife," he said, carelessly; but up to the brim of his hunting-cap, his face had flushed a dusky red.

"I should have fancied, shouldn't you, doctor?" said the old man, silyly, "that if he liked rebellion in all other cases, he'd not have objected to a little in his sweetheart."

"I could have fancied it, too," Athol answered, smiling. "But, talking of horses, Rourke, I met Newley in the village as I came through, and he was riding the black filly Mrs. Trenham bought at his recommendation. How thoroughly at home he makes himself with everything at Hohve!"

"Rather," laughed Rourke, with proud nonchalance, though Athol did not like the flash of brilliance in his eyes; "let him do it while he can. His mistress says he manages for her as no one else could manage, so she is welcome to his management while she needs it."

"It's rather a curious kind of management for a steward," put in Bartle, drily; "savoring a trifle too strongly of master instead. He has over-much power in his hands, considering they aren't clean or honorable ones. We old-fashioned folks, Rourke, won't soon forget his making the old squire's widow sell the Hohve living."

She's the first Trenham that ever did *that*, and plenty of new-fangled notions she has brought us by it, too."

"*They* might have come if the living had been given, uncle," said Rourke, with a laughing glance into Athol's grave face. "But never mind them. Stick to those you like best."

"But I don't know yet which I *do* like best, my lad," said the old man, pondering; "*I shall wait and hear the merits of*

these. I was only wishing they hadn't come upon us so suddenly. He should have begun gradually—this new, clean shaven young parson of ours. We're too human, it strikes me, to jump at once from one kind of heaven to another. The old parson I first remember here—schoolfellow of your grandfather's, Rourke, who popped him into the living—as good as told us we could go to heaven quite comfortably in a padded post-shay. This young vicar as good as tells us we shan't get there at all unless we pack ourselves into spiked barrels, and get a lot of parsons to push us up hill. Don't you call that a change which we ought to get through gradually?"

"I think Spencer a good fellow enough," said Rourke; "but I confess I would rather be a saint than a sinner, if I had need to sue for his good offices. What do you say, Vere?"

"I hardly know," said Athol.

But he grew to know it afterwards.

"It may be a change for the better," mused Bartle, anxious only to detain the young men with him; "but it hasn't struck me yet. The old parson I was reminding myself of—your grandfather's chum—he *was* one for a comic song. I don't suppose he had his match for it in the county, and he generally liked a chorus, acted them a bit, and he'd a pretty good memory for a song, but not for over much besides. He'd just as often pray for our Sovereign Lady, Queen Anne, as for our Gracious Lord, King George, because it was in the old books. And I've known him forget his sermon till he had got up in the pulpit, and felt in all his empty pockets for it. But he wasn't put out, bless ye, not a bit. 'I've forgotten my sermon, brethren,' says he; 'but it doesn't matter. I'll read ye a chapter in Acts worth two of it.' Yes; great changes," continued Bartle, meditatively. "Last Sunday, when they handed round those velvet money-bags for us to put in half-pennies or half-crowns, as we liked (Who'd know the difference?), I couldn't help thinking of the things like warming-pans without lids that they used to poke into the pews to us in those old days. Many and many's the time, Rourke, that your grandfather's fallen asleep in his

arm-chair, all hidden away in his big pew, and never seen the warming-pan waiting for his sovereign. And I've seen parson—in the pulpit, lad—make all sorts of motions and antics to show the churchwarden how to wake the squire by poking the collecting-box into his shoulder. I believe it was a kind of revenge of your grandfather's always to poke the fire in the stove very loudly during the sermon, when he *did* chance to keep awake."

"Old Mr. Trenham must have highly valued the ministrations of his pastor, Mr. Bartle," said Athol, while Rourke laughed heartily.

"Valued them! I'll tell you how, doctor—there's no hurry, Rourke, lad, the hounds don't meet till half-past. Squire took a fancy once that he was seriously ill, and sent for parson—not to sing comic songs after dinner, but to be parson in earnest and pray for him. It was during a heavy thunderstorm, and parson wouldn't have turned out, I expect, for anyone else, for he wasn't over brave in the thunder. Well, he knelt down, and very uncomfortable he seemed, and took care to open his eyes every few minutes to be sure that he was safe so far. But squire kept his eyes upon him, and whenever parson's opened, he pulled him up, and told him sharply to stick to his business. Poor parson stood it as long as he could; but when at last a terrific crash rolled just over the room, he sprang at one bound straight up from his knees into the bed beside the squire, and covered his head clean up. 'All right, now, Trenham,' he said, in a contented muffled-up voice. 'Blankets are non-conductors.'"

"Do stop, uncle," cried Rourke, amid his laughter and his efforts to keep his horse still. "Don't further betray the in-sanity of our family."

"I never did, I never saw it, I've told you a hundred times," interrupted the old man, testy with eagerness.

"And did old Mr. Trenham really tell this tale himself?" asked Athol.

"And laughed well over it, too; for that illness was not serious after all—or the parson's prayers saved him."

"Lucky it wasn't a fatal illness," added

Rourke. "And surely now you must own a change was needed in the parson."

"We've had a gradual change since then. That's all I want, lad; a *gradualness* in the change; this new vicar, they tell me, is frightened of a bonnet. Why, bless me, a man isn't good for much if he'll turn aside to avoid meeting a bonnet in the village street."

"Hold hard, uncle," put in Rourke. "It's hardly so bad as that; Spencer merely—unlike the generality of little men—fights shy of ladies' society. He is an earnest little fellow and tries to do good. I wish to Heaven I thought more about such things myself. Now I suppose I must be off."

"You really leave us to-morrow, do you, Rourke?" asked the old man, wistfully detaining him; "and shall I only see you once again for two whole years?"

"You might, you know, if you would come to Hohve to-night, Uncle Bart. I should so like you to come and help me to keep my birthday. I should like to remember afterwards that you came first on this day. I had trouble enough to originate the ball, every one ought to reward me by coming."

"Why should you have had any trouble?" asked Athol. "Before going abroad for two years, surely the squire of Hohve may give a ball to his friends."

"I expect he only did it to please a certain young lady," said Abram, glancing curiously into the young squire's beautiful dark blue eyes. "Well, dear lad, of course you'll enjoy it."

"Though my own uncle refuses to come?"

Bartle laughed merrily; yet there was something unutterably sad in the longing look he fixed upon the young man's face.

"Fancy it! Fancy old Abry's figure dodging here and there among the elegant county-folk. Just you fancy you see it when you are looking about you, and—why, if you were talking politics to the Lord Chancellor, I'd defy you to help laughing at the thought, eh, Rourke? No, if ever I enter Hohve again, my lad, there'll be no such name as Horton Newley entered there."

"Two years will soon pass for Trenham, Mr. Bartle," said Athol, "and then he will be home again to take the power into his own hands."

"True, true," muttered Abram, in a low, unsatisfied tone. "But I wish——"

"Never mind the old sore, to-day, uncle," interrupted Rourke. "Good-bye for to-day. My real good-bye will be to-morrow. Expect me early, for I shall not go to bed at all until I reach London to-morrow night."

"I shall expect you from the moment you leave me now until I see you; I always do," said the old man, his eyes still cleaving to Rourke's face. "Doctor"—the words were half whispered, while young Trenham rode on—"send me a little more of the old medicine, will you? That's why I asked you to call, but I didn't want to mention it before my boy. The old pain masters me now and then."

"Vere," said Rourke, when they had gone together out of the old farmer's hearing, "I heard that whisper. Tell me what is the matter with my uncle."

"He did not wish you to know; but—perhaps it is as well you should," the young physician answered, gravely. "He has what he himself calls 'heart-disease,' and I need not give it another name."

"It's a large heart to be diseased."

That was all Rourke's answer, but he spoke no other word until they stopped at The Cottage gate. Then Athol lightly nodded good-bye.

"Be early to-night, Vere," Rourke said; "spend as many hours at Hohve as you can; won't you?"

"Certainly I will, on your last night; but you will come here to bid good-bye to-morrow?"

"Of course; but need that prevent your giving me a hand-shake now?"

It was a close, hearty hand-clasp, though the parting was to be for but a few hours; for the friendship between the two young men was one of those firm, deep-rooted ones which are—thank God!—less rare than beautiful. They were such friends as the wise king dreamed of when he wrote that "a friend loveth *at all times*;" while something in the nature of the young men, or

the teaching of their lives, gave them a similarity deeper than all their striking contrasts.

"I wish Vere's life were a smoother one and an easier," thought Rourke as he cantered along the road beyond The Cottage carrying lightly his twenty-five years, and defying the restless thoughtfulness which was part of his nature. "I wish he had an enormous practice and a wife like Una—and no sister at all."

"I wish Rourke's home were a happier one," thought Athol, as he walked slowly up to the cottage door, bearing gravely his thirty-two years, "and that he had the guard of a mother's love about him, to keep him brave and spotless through these years."

And the wishes died upon the breath, as millions of wishes die and fade each day we live.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was a little round, red tower in the grounds of Hohve, which was known far and wide as The Den, though no one could tell who had first affixed the name to it. It was built on a grassy mound, in which a flight of a dozen steps leading to the door were cut and paved. It consisted of one cylindrical room, handsomely furnished, as far as its extent would allow, and having two low, wide windows on opposite sides, rounded with the wall, and opening on an iron balcony which ran round the tower, and commanded one of the finest and most extensive views of Hohve.

This Den belonged of course exclusively to the squire, and Rourke Trenham, though not naturally fond of solitude and retirement, and though possessing a nature exactly the reverse of indolent, enjoyed many idle hours there. Not that he kept the room for himself; every friend and companion he had knew themselves welcome—could they ever doubt it when they saw Rourke's pleasant and ever grateful greeting?—yet still Rourke had but few who came. His college friend he rarely asked to Hohve; for this indefinable and subordinate position he held in his father's house at present would, he knew

be a subject for endless remark and surprise among other young men, even of pity for himself most likely; and from this he shrank with most utter repulsion. Of the young men of his own neighborhood Athol Vere was the one most gladly received by Rourke in his den, but then Athol had his work to do, and it was not often he could spare the hours through which Rourke liked to have him sitting opposite him at the window or the fire, now smoking in satisfied silence, now talking of a hundred things which made the hours pass gaily, and now drifting, as they two could at times, into a rarer talk, which made the day seem better and the beyond more pleasant, Trenham thought.

The only occupant of The Den in the late afternoon of this day was Rourke's valet, a small, brisk fellow, with a keen intelligent, whiskerless face and closely cut dark hair. He was setting the room in order rather differently from what he did on ordinary occasions; gathering various loose papers carefully together; sorting the books that lay about, putting some with papers to be carried to the house, and locking others away with an assortment of various other things, including glasses, decanters, a set of old carved chessmen, a few packs of cards, and the games which had that season come into vogue, and of which Rourke was not tired yet. While the man locked these things out of sight, and gathered up the cigars that lay about the room, he all the while kept watch through that window which commanded the grand sweep before the steps on which the cannon stood, beside the door of Hohve. The nature of the man glanced out as he pursued this double occupation; a deft neatness which was almost womanly, and a watchful alertness most thoroughly man-like.

"Triton"—the word was called through the open window to a huge Newfoundland dog which lay on the balcony without—"go and see if the master is coming. Go and see, good fellow."

The dog pricked up its ears a moment, then rose and walked deliberately down the steps of the green slope; and Andrew Brent went on with his work with a smile.

"By getting everything straight to-day,"

he said to himself, "I leave to-morrow morning free; and I *think* she will come. By doing all these things to-day," he added, "I prevent its falling to any of those fellows who don't think shame to do no master's bidding but Mr. Newley's. Not a bad steward, so far as I know him (which isn't far, though far enough); but I don't see the use of mixing up squire and steward as it's done here, and letting so much of the squire fall upon the steward, and stick to him. Well, it don't hurt the master much so far, and it'll hurt him less, of course, by-and-by, when the mistress hasn't all her own will. Or, rather—or, rather—" puzzled Andrew, pausing a moment to look out—"I don't feel quite clear yet whether it is that the mistress *has* her own will, or has no will of her own. Ha! there's Triton. Then he'll ride into sight himself in a minute."

But Triton had come on hastily to report, and it was several minutes before Rourke rode up to the open sweep, where his servant could see him. Just as he did so, Horton Newley came sauntering down from the yard and met him.

Rourke reined in his horse with a gesture of impatience, for Newley was walking directly in his way.

Andrew heard none of the words which passed between the two young men (indifferent words enough), but he saw something in the attitude of both which made him loiter in his brisk employment, and gaze upon them with a wondering, vague intentness.

Yet he could only see what *seemed* to be. There was a wide power—built on craft and cunning—in the steward's slight and carefully-kept hands; but the power all *seemed* to be with Rourke, as he sat above him, square and firm upon his saddle; the restive horse quite still now, under his skilful, mastering hand.

Brent roused himself suddenly from his gaze and joined his master, prepared to take the hunter.

"What's that for!" said Rourke, as he dismounted. "Where are the grooms?"

"In the yard, sir, I expect. I'll take her up to them."

Newley looked after the man curiously,

as he led the horse away. Rourke looked after him, too, with a laugh in his eyes.

"I believe Brent would rather be a groom than a body-servant after all," he remarked.

"I believe he wants to be *everything* to you," said Newley; and Rourke answered carelessly that perhaps he would have his wish some day.

"His devoted wish will be gratified when he feels you have no one else to depend upon," said Newley, with a keen glance into the young squire's face. "I advise you not to take him abroad with you—such an incongruous mixture of groom and valet, and so helplessly English! He will have no idea what to do, either for you or for himself, when he has once crossed the Channel. I have written to the man who was recommended to me. He has been abroad with an earl's family for many years; you will find him invaluable."

"Thanks, but you needn't have bothered yourself about it," said Rourke, lightly. "I shall take Brent, and I don't believe I shall need anyone else. If I do, I can get a foreign fellow over there to help him."

"It's odd, Mr. Trenham," said Newley, with a glance of defeated malice in his eyes.

"But then you think most things are odd which I do," returned Rourke, with a passing wonder why the steward should care what servant he took with him; "or I promise so, from your representation of them to Mrs. Trenham."

Without waiting for a reply to this Rourke ran up the steps; and on the way to his own room met his stepmother gliding languidly downstairs in her velvet dinner-dress.

"I thought," she said, in answer to his smile and nod, "that you were staying out to dine."

"Dining out in this dress!" he answered laughing, as he glanced down at his clayey boots and splashed red coat. "Though I have, haven't I, before now, stopped with old Uncle Digby or at Rupert's Rest. But I should not have done so to-night, even if I had been scrupulously attired. Did you not see I should leave you to dine alone on thing night?"

"No; but I've asked—told Newley to dine with us to-night."

Rourke started back, the genial look all gone from his face, a proud contempt there in its stead.

"Next year—at this pace—you will be asking him to meet our other guests, and asking other guests on purpose to meet him. I only wonder," he added, scornfully, "that you did not ask him to grace the ball to-night."

"I did," said Mrs. Trenham, with a deliberateness, which might be either cool defiance or a touch of fear.

"You *did*!" cried Rourke, an angry fire in his eyes; "you did! You asked *him* to come to do honor to my birthday; you asked *him*—a servant whom my father took into his house for charity, because you told him that the boy was homeless, and would serve us well! Is *he* to come here to be one with the guests we honor? to sit at my table among them, and dance with—By my soul, he shall not! Such a thing was never heard of."

"It will be heard of now," said Mrs. Trenham, with haughty coldness, though her heart was beating uncomfortably. "I have told him to be here. He dresses well, and bears himself well, and behaves well; and I choose he shall take a place among my guests. Whether he can hold it or not, depends upon himself, and you will see."

"Why did you not tell me before?" said Rourke, speaking leisurely for a moment in the strength and heat of his passion, as strong men often do. "I would have given Brent an invitation too. How many of the women servants have you invited?"

"Don't be inconsistent, Rourke," said his stepmother, seizing her passing advantage; "they are none of them his equals. He has no equals in the house, poor fellow. You, naturally perhaps, hold yourself his superior, because you—well, I will not enlarge upon that now; and the servants are of course, his inferiors."

"Precious few of them."

"You, Rourke," cried Mrs. Trenham beginning to shed tears, "always misjudged in your blind prejudice. Another so would value one who was so devoted to h

mother. Think what I should be without Newley's constant advice and service."

Rourke looked down curiously into the tearful face. What was there in this woman which could have won his father's heart? Were any other homes governed by such rule as this?

"Value Newley's services as you like," he said, "I never complain of that; but is he to entirely monopolise my place?"

"He is so much more experienced and thoughtful than you are, Rourke."

"You are no judge," the young man said; "you have never tried me; you have trusted all to him, *nothing* to me. By heaven, when I think of the injury my father did me, in making me a cipher in his house, I hardly trust myself."

"Was it injury in your father to place confidence in his wife?" inquired Mrs. Trenham, smiling coldly. "And is it unnatural that I should place confidence in one who is skilful and cautious? You ought to rejoice that I have sense to do so, and be glad to see him in this house."

"If you *had* made up your mind to ask him to this ball," said the young man, sternly, "why did not you let it be a mixed ball, as I wished, for the tenantry and servants, as well as for our own friends?"

"Because I dislike such things; they are a great trouble, and there is always some ridiculous offence taken by somebody or other for what I do. What is the use of exciting yourself for nothing, Rourke? It is *not* a mixed ball, and Horton Newley is to be here."

"If he does come—for I hope you will have the good taste even yet to stop him—I shall insult him. I will put no restraint upon myself, and so I know I shall insult him in the sight and hearing of every guest that is here. How could I help it? And what must the sneak expect but that, if he dares to take such gross advantage of—?"

"He will not mind," interrupted Mrs. Trenham, with cool unconcern. "He has been insulted by you too often to mind it now. It never moves him. He is an older and more self-governed man than you are, and knows how to allow for a hasty and impatient spirit. He would bear more

than that for my sake, because he is faithful to me, and knows how dependent I am upon him."

The glimpse of helplessness in this speech touched Rourke. "I do not say he is not faithful to *you*," he said, almost gently, "and I do not wish you to slight his services. I only ask you not to let him usurp my place. My place!" he repeated, with a sudden, patient quietness—"what place have I for him to usurp? I never was deferred to, as he is deferred to; thought of, as he is thought of; cared for, as he is cared for; not even when I was a little, motherless boy, thrown on your care and love. Ah! my God, I am low indeed to be pleading with you for what you lavish on a servant; yet I cannot help doing it to-night. Let him go, mother. Let him go back to—or let him stay here, if you will, in his own post; but let me take his place with you, the place of which he has robbed me, or which you have voluntarily given to him. Why should he come between us?"

"You are going away," said Mrs. Trenham, chillily.

"But I need not," the young man answered, still with patience. "It was your wish for me to go now. I did not choose my own time. I will stay if you wish it. I can go in a year's time—or in two. There's no hurry, and the management of my father's estate would be pleasant to me; only say that you would like it."

"No; let things be as they are. I know I have decided for the best; and—and I hope," she added, the weak tears falling from her eyes, "that you will behave well to-night to Horton Newley, and not let there be any scene."

Rourke passed on in silence. It was the last time he made the appeal, which had been made a hundred times before, and always as uselessly. This was the end of the hope which he had nourished, against hope, that he might take his proper place in his father's house, without misery or violence, or death. This was the end; and the very *fear* of what must follow might have wrung those tears from Mrs. Trenham's eyes, even if they had been blind in their anguish.

CHAPTER VI.

"Don't speak of him to me. Please don't, Una ; I want to forget that he is here. I want, if possible, to forget his very existence ; and you can make me do so if you choose—you only, my darling."

The girl looked up with a smile into Rourke's eyes, brilliant in their excitement to-night, yet still with the "wet violet" look which little Lorraine had seen in them five years ago. "But, Rourke," she said, thinking (in her anxious, ignorant gentleness) that the words would soothe and please him, "you really need not have been so nervous or so vexed at his being here to-night. He looks very well, and bears himself well. As far as we can see, he is as well-bred as anyone here ; more so than little Sir Peter Vaughan, with all his title. If not a gentleman, Mr. Newley is quite gentlemanly."

"If not?" repeated Rourke, "why, you know you would not use that word to describe a gentleman."

"Is it true that Mr. Newley's father was a butler, Rourke?"

"No one knows ; no one ever hears it, of course," said the young man, moodily. "But that does not matter. A man may have the nature of a gentleman though his father has been a scullion—if there are such things nowadays. But this is all different. The man has not only not the honor of a gentleman, but not even the honesty of a trustworthy servant ; and it enrages me beyond all words to see him tender his base coin among us, treating us all as blind fools who cannot distinguish it from the sterling metal."

"Don't get angry about him, Rourke," said Una Gaveston, with no vexation in her happy smile. "Just notice how wisely he is behaving ; not pushing himself forward at all, yet not a bit shy or shamefaced. I am sure he must be trying all he can to please you."

"I wish," began Rourke, with a long, craving look into the girl's eyes, as if he sought there for something which should make his own thought clear. (Ah ! poor Rourke, it was a long, long search!) "I wish—But never mind him longer. Do not let a single remembrance of him come be-

tween you and me. I must be an idiot, must I not ? to let one thought of him have power to cloud the brightness of this hour, while I am with you, my love."

Rourke and Una were sitting in one of the deep window-seats of the great hall at Hohve. He had led her to this spot to rest, and now kept her sitting there beside him, while the dancing went on in the long dining-room and library at the other end of the hall, and the vague enchantment of the softened music hovered about him.

"Una, give me that promise once again, my darling. It was the sweetest music that my ears could ever hear."

"Una looked up brightly into the face she had loved for all the years she could remember.

"I promise," she said, seeing he was so much in earnest over the wish, "always to love you as I love you to-night—as I have always loved you, Rourke ; and I promise to be as true to you while you are away as I should be if you were with me every day. Why, of course I shall," the girl added, impulsively ; "I never could help it. I never could think of any one else as I think of you ; you know it, Rourke."

"And I promise," he said, very low, as he took her face between his hands and kissed it, "to come home to you, after these two years, as true, as constant, as entirely your own, Una, my darling, as I am to-night."

Years afterwards, recalling this promise, which had gone from his heart with the earnestness of prayer, he was grateful that those had been the words exactly.

Then there was a silent, happy pause between them, which the music brightly filled. It was Una who broke it presently.

"And will you come to-morrow, Rourke ? We are not to bid good-bye to-night."

"My darling, no. I cannot bear such a suggestion. I am coming to-morrow to speak to Mr. Gaveston. Guess, Una, what he will say when I ask him for his pet?"

"He never denies me anything, you know, Rourke," she said, her head drooping, as she toyed with the flowers on her dress ; "and he is so fond of you. Don't smile, Rourke, he is indeed ; and he is fond of Hohve too. To have me settled

at Holve near him would be the very wish of his heart," she added, unconsciously expressing the cause of Rourke's smile. "And you are going to leave me with him for two years yet?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"So, with all these advantages, I'm sure he will say 'yes' with all his heart; and then—shall we not be happy?"

"So happy!" And even these two murmured words showed much of the intense craving for happiness, and the deep power of enjoying it, which Rourke's nature possessed.

Just then Lucilla Vere came up to the window-seat alone, her step idle and leisurely, but her eyes full of curiosity.

"Rourke, what do you think? Lots of the ladies are dancing with Mr. Newley, and say he dances so well. I think Mrs. Trenham must have asked them, for she asked me. But I would not dance with him, Rourke, unless you wish it, and I know you do not."

"I hope you have no objection," said Una, looking anxiously up into his face as they all stood now, "because Mrs. Trenham asked me to give him a dance, and I promised. I thought you would like me to please her, Rourke."

He looked into her wistful eyes, and the sudden anger died out of his own. "You did it for the best," he said, "as you do everything. But I would rather not see the dance. Which is it?"

"The last before supper."

"Lucilla," he began, and she understood a little better than Una did the strong command he put upon himself, "will you give me that dance—in the other room?"

"I am so sorry she answered 'but I'm engaged for that to Cousin Howard.'"

It was only in rare moments of triumph or excitement that Lucy had courage to speak of Mr. Gaveston as her cousin, because he never himself brought forward the cousinship to her mother.

"To papa!" exclaimed Una, laughing.

"Why, Lucilla, you must have asked him. He hates dancing. He never does dance unless he is regularly worried into it."

Miss Vere did not at all relish the plain words, yet she joined in the laugh.

"He enjoys a dance as much as anyone, when he is amused," she said. "Now I must go back; I have promised Sir Peter Vaughan the next."

"Let me take you then," said Rourke, in his blunt, prompt courtesy; "Una will stay here till I return."

With unquestioning obedience, she resumed her place in the window, and there Rourke found her waiting patiently when he returned to her, though Lucilla had not very hastily been claimed from him by Sir Peter.

The ball was half over. The band was silent. The dancers were arranging matters with each other. Very few would voluntarily sit through this new valse of Godfrey's—very few ever do voluntarily sit through the last dance before supper. Rourke, just released from one of his duty dances and preparing to leave the room, paused a moment beside Una. Her last partner had left her on young Trenham's approach. The group around her he did not heed as he spoke.

"You little know what hard work it is for me to go away and give you up to Newley. Don't require me to do it ever again, Una. He is here on sufferance. He had no right to take a mean advantage of your kindness."

"Don't stay away, Rourke," pleaded the girl timidly; "I'm—I'm very sorry I promised Mr. Newley. I wish I need not dance this valse with him."

"You need not have promised," he answered quietly; "having done so, of course you must give it to him. Why should you shrink from it now? Don't you remember saying he was *gentlemanly* and danced well—I suppose," he added, checking the sarcastic words, "that I may join you again after supper."

With still that restless longing in his eyes, at variance with the happiness which filled his heart when he told himself again and again that Una loved him, Rourke turned away. As he slowly crossed the almost empty hall, Newley overtook and joined him.

"I wish you would oblige me by taking my place through this dance," he began, speaking with an exaggerated indifference.

"I do not like to disappoint Miss Gaveston of it."

Rourke saw in a moment that both his words and Una's had been overheard; but he felt nothing but a great flaming wrath at the insolence of the speech.

"Are you addressing me?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Newley, for he as rarely as possible used any name in addressing Mrs. Trenham's step-son, "I am tired of the sameness of this scene, and the tameness of all I hear; but of all the partners falling to my share Miss Gaveston is, in my opinion, the most thoroughly enervating."

"Newley," said Rourke, with a deadly quietness, "are your words meant to tempt me to raise my hand against you?"

"I did not know," said Newley, calmly, "that there was anything personal in my remark, your name not being synonymous with Miss Gaveston's. But will you oblige me in this matter? I want to be released, but do not like to be the means of her losing any enjoyment. If you will *not* do so," added the steward placidly, "of course, I must go back."

"If your fingers touch Miss Gaveston's to-night," said Rourke, standing and facing Horton Newley for a minute, "you shall answer it to me; not as one gentleman to another, but as a servant to his master; do you understand?"

"You take my proposal oddly," said Newley, a slow smile curling his lips, and one white-gloved hand leisurely pulling his pointed whiskers. But he turned away, entirely satisfied with the reception of his latest and keenest insult.

The company had assembled in the supper-room, a brilliant, noisy, happy-looking crowd. The ladies were most of them already seated; the gentlemen standing about, finding seats for themselves, or for those of the younger ladies who had been either loitering on their way or holding modestly back.

Rourke Trenham, coolly conversing with half a dozen people round him, was leading Una Gaveston to her seat, when Horton Newley made his way up to them, and, bending towards her, as she leaned on Rourke's arm, spoke to be heard by the crowd around her.

"Miss Gaveston, pray allow me to gize to you for disappointing you valse. An unexpected summons to away. I was indeed mortified to th your having so vainly reserved it f and am delighted to see that you h lowed Mr. Trenham the privilege w appeared to neglect. Nothing but b could have detained me."

"I do not wonder business calle away, Newley. I only wonder it al you to come at all. There is no steward's business to transact here to-so you have permission to retire."

Rourke had not raised his voice, b clear, proud tones escaped very few the room. For a minute the two gazed at each other, while Una, n and frightened, pressed Rourke's ar pealingly; then Newley broke the with ready tact, though many of t standers could see what an intense c was for him to speak with ease and j ness.

"I am come now to beg excuse f further absence, as well as to mal apologies to Miss Gaveston."

He bowed, with a quiet deference had no servility in it; while even who would have scorned him if h stayed, answered pleasantly the wor action which seemed so modest. Th was gone, and Rourke felt a mis weight upon him, which he could way account for.

After this the ball went on undist to its close, with the laughter, and the burning, and the jealousy, and the pl which balls create, and will do unt end of time.

When the last guest left Hohve, the was softly touching the distant hills, cool hand laid upon the brow o heated night, soothing and allayin restless excitement. And Rourke bareheaded on the steps, revelling pure, chill, morning air.

"You have a fine constitution, Tre as you know, but you trifle with it a too daringly."

Those had been Dr. Vere's parting v when he left him there without hat o coat, heated from dancing; but, t

they came back to Rourke's memory, mixed with Una's loving farewell words, he still stood there, leaning against the old cannon; looking on the dim, wide park—every tree in which he loved with a clinging, boyish love—and passing thus unconsciously through one of his painfulest farewells in the beauty and the mystery of the dawn. And it may have struck Rourke how much less sad this mute farewell would have been, if in the home he was leaving there had been some one to give to himself just such a wide, warm love as he lavished upon the place which was to be his own one day.

The grey light on the horizon had brightened into silver, and the breeze had lost a little of its first fresh purity when Rourke turned and re-entered the house. Half an hour afterwards he left it by a side door, dressed for riding.

"Ha! Brent, only now going off to the station," he exclaimed, meeting his servant suddenly; you will be late if you don't take care; and it will be a shame to let your little sweetheart arrive first. Run, man, the train is due in Kumley at 7:45."

"But I went to leave your message in the yard, sir, and the groom says there must be some mistake, as you told him the new chestnut was not to carry you. So he would not believe my order that it was to be brought round to you at eight."

"All right," said Rourke, passing on, "you go and meet Rhoda. I will leave my own orders."

Rourke had mounted and left the park, and the eight o'clock bell was ringing in the stable turret, when Horton Newley, strolling from the Hohve gardens into the lane which skirted them, encountered two people loitering together near the gate through which he passed. One was Andrew Brent, the young squire's valet, the other a young girl dressed in a cheap, gay dress, and with a face rosily, brightly, childishly pretty. Newley's eyes were fixed in cool surprise upon it, while it reddened with a deeper glow under his gaze.

"Good morning," he said, genially, as the young valet touched his hat. "You are in luck, Brent. Is this your sister?"

"My sweetheart," Mr. Newley said Andrew, with loving pride, as he gently drew

her forward for inspection. "Rhoda Burke. She's come down to bid me good-bye, and I've been to meet the train. I should have gone to her at Atton, but there were reasons against it. She gets laughed at in her place about me, and she don't like it much. They're not very kind, the people she lives with, and of course their laugh isn't pleasant. So to prevent it this time I didn't go, but Rhoda got a holiday to come and see an aunt in Kumley."

"Very sensible arrangement," said Newley heartily, his eyes still dwelling on the girl's blushing face, with a smile which she never tried to fathom, "and the aunt in Kumley will not see much of her?"

"Oh! she will go there," said Andrew conscientiously. "On our way back to the station this afternoon, maybe. This is our last day, and it would be hard if we shouldn't spend it together when we are to be parted for two years. Then after that when the master comes home, Rhoda and me are to be married."

Newley's sympathetic laugh was infectious as Andrew thus frankly explained matters. Rhoda hid her crimson cheeks with her plump hands, looking coyly over them into the steward's face.

"Then you have leave of absence to-day, Brent?"

"Yes, Mr. Newley; the master gave me leave, as I got all my preparations over yesterday, all but a few things the other servants have to do. They are all eager to do anything for the master before he goes."

"And the parting is very hard, I suppose?"

"A great deal harder, sir, than it would be if I knew Rhoda was quite happy."

"And are you not happy, then, Rhoda?—a very pretty name."

Newley was leaning against the gate through which he had come, the brown leaves falling from the trees above him. Rhoda, though shrinking almost nervously from his concentrated gaze, could not help thinking what a nice gentleman he was, and how kindly he spoke to them, though they were only servants.

"Not a bit happy," she owned, with a sigh of mingled coquetry and resignation.

"You must bide it patiently, Rhoda,

dear," said her lover, in his frank simplicity. "Two years will soon go, and then I'll make it all up to you."

"Could not something be done to make the girl more comfortable?" asked Newley, his eyes leaving her face and straying along the road. "You are a good fellow, and she looks a good girl, and I should think something might be done. Let me see, old Miriam at the Winterfield Lodge is looking out for some one to help her and take care of her. I will speak about it."

"I fear it will not do, sir," put in Brent, unwillingly. "Of course Miriam could not pay, and, Rhoda dear, I fear I don't earn enough for both of us, and to put away for our marriage and furniture and things. It's a kind thought though of yours, Mr. Newley."

"Miriam *can* afford to pay, or I never should have proposed it," said Newley, composedly. "She always intended to pay for help, and to pay well, I believe. Rhoda would like to live here, I dare say, and you would go away content yourself to leave her here. By the way, I would not mention this before I went if I were you, Brent, as you cannot possibly wait to see it all settled. As soon as you are gone, I will put it into Miriam's hands. Then the servants here, at any rate, cannot laugh at Rhoda about her sweetheart."

"Rhoda dear, you would be so content with Miriam," said her lover, with earnest gladness; "and it's such a comfortable cottage, and Mrs. Trenham's housekeeper would be kind to you."

A shadow, scarcely perceptible, and gone in an instant, crossed Newley's face.

"Yes, Mrs. Sheriff would be kind to you," he said. "That is one reason why I should like Brent to feel you are near here. The parting is hard enough for him, I dare say, without his having to feel that you are uncomfortable and uncared for."

"I don't know what thanks I can say, Mr. Newley," said the simple, grateful fellow, as he touched his hat.

"Don't say any, then. And do *you* like the thought of being here?"

He asked the girl this question in his most genial tones, smiling straight into her eyes. She felt the charm of the smile.

She appreciated the whiteness of the ringed hand which, a little bit restlessly, stroked back the soft brown whiskers. She understood the value of the handsome clothes, and she curtailed involuntarily as she uttered her thanks, and told him, with the unconscious dawning of an unacknowledged truth, that she would rather live there than anywhere, she was sure.

"Then it's all settled," said the steward, with a gay depreciation of all thanks to himself. "Now go to the house for breakfast; and, Andrew, as I said before, do not mention this yet—let the offer come direct from Miriam to Rhoda—but call in at the Winterfield Lodge at noon. Good-day to you."

An odd, covert eagerness lingered in Newley's eyes after he had turned away.

"That is Trenham's one faithful, devoted servant," he muttered to himself, as he walked on; "the man he persists in taking with him; the man who would not serve another master for any offer; and who loves with all his heart that pretty, vain doll. Well, let it be."

CHAPTER VII.

DR. VERE was just passing through his cottage-gate that morning when Rourke rode up to it.

"Why, Athol," he exclaimed, as he dismounted, "you don't mean to tell me you start on your daily rounds so early as this?"

"No, not usually, but I have an unexpected and hasty summons into Atton, and as I am obliged to walk, I must start at once. No train stops at Kumley for the next two hours."

"Then I *am* glad I happened to come just now," cried Trenham, laying on hand upon the chestnut, while he gave Athol the other. "Athol, dear old fellow, I've brought this as a parting gift, little remembrance of me. It's a selfish idea, after all, but I want you to have cause to think of me often. Your thoughts are always good thoughts, Athol, and want a share in them. Try him now Mount and try him now. He carries splendidly up to fifteen stone, and you don't

ride that by a very long way ; and he is the quietest fast runner I ever saw. You always said you must have a quiet animal, because of needing him so often held for you, or leaving him at cottage-doors, or something. Vere, dear fellow, I think you will like him ; and it will be such a pleasure to me to picture you on him on your errands of good."

Athol's eyes turned hurriedly from his friend's face. Something in its gladness struck him sadly. He stroked the beautiful chestnut horse with a caressing touch, but could not trust himself to speak of the thoughtful and most useful gift.

"Do you like him? Do you admire him, Vere?" asked Rourke, with boyish eagerness. "Tell me if you do, old fellow. I so seldom have a pleasure like this."

Then Athol told him what he thought both of the gift and of the giver, but the words were but broken and unsteady ones, after all.

"Now, I suppose I must not keep you," said Rourke, presently, laying his left hand upon the one he held of Athol's. "You will not forget me, Vere, I know, worthless fellow though I have always been ; and I want to ask you to remember something else. Will you see as much as you can of my uncle at The Narrowway? He will be sure to miss me just at first, because I've always been used to pop in upon him at all kinds of likely and unlikely hours. And you will look after Miriam sometimes at the Winterfield Lodge? She is breaking down, I fear, poor old soul! I have asked my mother to let her have a companion, or servant, or something ; but I don't know whether she will. It is of no use my asking you to see my mother sometimes, professionally, is it? Newley prevents that ; and, if she were ill, would only call in Thorne. Well, we cannot help it, however earnestly I may wish it were not so, as I always feel so satisfied about anyone in your care. And sometimes will you tell me something of Una—things she would not be likely to tell me herself?"

"Then it is all right for you there?" asked Athol, trying to look cheerfully into Rourke's eyes, while they grew dim and misty like his own.

"Yes, all right. And, Athol, when I come back, perhaps just such happiness will have come to you ; and, besides that, you will be the most sought after, as well as the best physician in this county and the next. You won't forget to write to me often—as often, at least, as you comfortably can?"

"I won't forget," said Athol, trying to steady his voice. "Won't you go in and breakfast with Lucy? She was not down when I left."

"Of course not down yet, after such a late ball!" exclaimed Rourke as cheerfully as he could. "I shall wait to see her, certainly, but not breakfast with her, thank you. What would Uncle Bartle say? You will not forget—not *ever* forget—to care for him, Athol, remembering what you told me yesterday morning? And, if ever he is ill, you will telegraph for me at once—promise me."

"If—yes, I promise," corrected the young physician, earnestly. "I promise all you ask, dear Rourke."

"Thank you ; thank you from my heart. Now mount and let me watch you out of sight. Good-bye, dear fellow, dear old friend."

"Watch him out of sight," Rourke had said ; but both horse and rider were only a dim blur upon the road before him ; and Athol, looking back, saw the leaning, watching figure at the gate, through even a still more blinding mist of tears.

Rourke went into the cottage presently, and waited for Miss Vere's appearance. After a chat with her, and a friendly good-bye, he went down the garden again, and raised his hat to her from the gate with a smile in his eyes where the rare, sad tears had been so lately.

Lucilla had not felt it expedient to venture with him out into the open air after the previous night's "effects"; but she could afford to stand at the window now, and kiss her hand enthusiastically.

Then Rourke walked on, as lightly and swiftly as if he had had a night's rest instead of dancing, and entered the parlor at The Narrowway with the unanswerable greeting which had been his almost from childhood.

"Hallo ! Uncle Bart. Here I am."

Abram was standing at his parlor window. Some instinct had told him that his boy would come to breakfast, and he was delaying the meal on every conceivable pretext, while Judith's disgust at such a weak proceeding was made sufficiently manifest.

"I thought so," the old man murmured, turning to the door with a smile of quiet pleasure ; "I thought so, Rourke, dear lad. I knew you would come. It is not in you to disappoint the old man is it ?"

"It is not in me to disappoint myself, uncle," he answered, and came into the room and took his old seat at the breakfast table, as easily as if there had been no such word as "farewell" to throw either its present or its future shadow between the two. Through the meal they chatted gaily together, each pushing from his way the remembrance of the coming parting.

Rourke recalled, for his uncle's amusement, various incidents of the ball at Hohve ; drifted almost unthinkingly into the relation of Newley's insolence ; then, hurrying to blot out the memory of that, told of his own happiness in having won Una Gaveston's love. With heartfelt gratitude, as well as pleasure, he received the old man's congratulations ; then the two fell back into their old usual talk—so broken and so simple upon its deep foundations.

At last the meal, though lengthened to its fullest extent, was over ; then Rourke rose unwillingly. "I'm going into the kitchen for a minute, to perform an operation upon Judith," he said, still avoiding the last word. "Is it very breezy this morning, uncle, or a calm ?"

Abram stood before the fire, rubbing his hands and laughing quietly. He thought it just as well not to enlighten Rourke as to the temper Judith had displayed while breakfast had been kept waiting for him. "I'll trust it to the operation," he thought slyly to himself. "She's known him since he was a baby, and has a bit of liking for him too, stowed in an out-of-the-way corner of her heart. She can't resist his grown-up kiss."

"Quite calm, I expect," he said, aloud ; "good luck to ye Rourke ; only don't go so far as to risk a breach of promise."

"A man might do worse," replied Rourke, his face inimitably grave, as he left the room.

He returned in a state of triumph. "The breezes are all westerly, Uncle Bart ; the softest zephyrs you can imagine, and really I'd no idea how becoming are blushes to the female countenance."

"Of course you 'hadn't," said Abram, imitating the young man's tone of grave amusement ; "only modest little maidens, like Judith, would ever blush for you, not weather-beaten spinsters like Miss Una."

"Uncle Bart," said Rourke, presently, all the fun going from his face, as he smoothed the way at last for the last word, "when Una and I live at Hohve, remember that you have promised never to pass by the gates as you pass by them now ; and—oh ! won't those be grand times ! And you and I will have such discussions about Winterfield, and try every kind of experiment. It shall be the first and finest model farm in—well, in England. It only requires a good round sum laid out upon it to begin with. I've quite decided to manage it myself, when I am master of Hohve—always with your help."

"True, true, lad ; manage it yourself, and if—" the old farmer checked himself suddenly, "we've no business with *ifs* at parting," he said, one hand on the young man's shoulder, as he spoke with stifled sigh. "No *ifs*, lad. All of us bright and hopeful ; but strong, and prepared for any thing. D'ye see, dear lad ? not *expecting* the worst, but strong to meet it if it comes. And now, my boy, is it really good-bye at last ?"

Yes, it had come at last. The little word, so easy to write, so hard to speak, was said ; and they parted in the long old-fashioned parlor where they had spent so many hours together. It was Mr. Bartle's almost invariable custom to saunter with Rourke through the fold, or the gardens, or the meadows, whenever he left The Narrowway ; but this morning he stayed behind at the parlor-window.

"I—I have only my slippers on," he said, seeming to forget how little he had heeded this at other times. And so Rourke went alone, and when he had turned at the gate

had bared in the winter sunshine, bravely smiling in their unsteady eyes saw nothing of the pitiful, child-like upon the old man's worn, brown

the Trenham was ushered at once to Mr. Gaveston's presence when he saw Rupert's Rest, and had not been any minutes before Una's father had given hearty consent to his suit.

Una can settle all preliminaries when she is in Trenham," he said, in a matter-of-course of business, though he made it at an unusually genial smile; "suppose we must look upon this as a business engagement."

Una answered eagerly that for himself she was binding and life-long engagement, but during the two years of his absence she should do his best to prove him worthy of Una, and of the confidence her father had placed in him.

Her gratitude, and his anxiety to go to her, hardly knew what he said, but it was to content Mr. Gaveston, and their part was prompt and satisfactory.

In the hall Rourke encountered Mr. Efford, who was Una's companion instead of her governess, and she told him to congratulate him, and to tell her father and her favorite, every opportunity. The young man thanked her, glad, courteous way, then he went to Una's sitting-room, and found her alone with her at last.

That morning sped they neither of them fully knew; that it *had* sped, they knew only too well when the summons came.

"Half-past six!" cried Rourke, starting when the bell clanged in the hall. "My love, where have the hours flown? I must hasten, or I shall not be in time for lunch at home. Oh, no, dear, I say, I must take this last meal with her at home."

"Suppose you must," sighed Una; "I dare say Mr. Newley will be there. Rourke," she went on, laying her hand on her cheek as the angry color rose there, "how can I bear it without you for two whole years? What a long time separated!"

"But after that, my love," he said, gently, "we shall be together for always, in our own beautiful happy home. Look back two years, the time does not seem very long, does it? So these will pass more swiftly than we dream of now. And it will all be happiness after that."

"Una," he added presently, laughing down into her face as it rested on his breast, "give my love to your little sister when you see her next. I hope she is a steadier little mortal than she was when I had the pleasure of spending an evening with her here and a morning in Uncle Bartle's loft. What a scatter-brained atom she was, to be sure!"

"Why, Rourke," smiled Una, through her tears, "you speak as if she were an atom still. Lorraine is seventeen now; nearly grown up. When you come home she will be quite grown up, and living at home, I hope."

"I hope so too, my darling. For your sake, because you are fond of her; for her sake, because you will make her good, and gentle, and meek, like yourself."

Una was following the words on his lips. Did the idea seem strange to her even then?

"Lorraine will never be like me," she said simply.

"Never," assented Rourke, like a lover—as he was. "Who could be, my pretty, gentle love, my darling wife? Ah!" he laughed, kissing the cheek to which the color had risen with sudden brightness, "the word is so sweet I could not help saying it just once to forestall my happy home-coming. Good-bye, my own dear love."

One long look—glad in its affection, sad in its foreboding—into her innocent eyes. One long kiss upon her shaking lips. One long embrace, and then Rourke turned away with never a backward glance; and Una, dreading to be alone with her first sorrow, hurried away to her old governess.

At Kumley Priory Trenham halted only for a few minutes. This was essentially a duty-call, and one over which he had no desire to linger. Old Mr. Surle was sitting by the fire in his gloomy brown library, and he neither put down his paper nor raised his head from it, when his nephew entered.

"Good-bye!" he repeated drily, after Rourke had explained the object of his visit. "What's the effect of saying that? It's as senseless and useless a ceremony as was that ball at Hohve last night. Have you apologised to Newley yet?"

Rourke laughed. "Apologised! of course," he answered, gazing curiously at his uncle, as he stood opposite to him on the rug.

"How?"

This second question was more sharp and abrupt even than the first, and Digby raised his keen eyes from the paper for a moment.

"This way," replied Trenham leisurely. "I said I hoped I should not come back until his presence no longer darkened my father's house."

"Indeed!" observed Mr. Surle, grimly. "And how did he receive that most abject apology?"

"Very charmingly. He answered me, with his usual frank amiability, that he *thought* I should."

"You are a random, headstrong senseless fellow," blurted out the old man, "and all I can say is, you'd better stop before you go too far. If you have a grain of sense left you, for goodness sake exert it and curry favor with the man in power. There, don't interrupt me; I mean what I say. Your only way is to go straight to him now and make amends for your speech last night. Be quiet: I don't believe *he* was the offender. Not he; a polite, politic, self-governed fellow. *He* would not burst out with an insult in the hearing of the whole county; don't try to tell me it was *his* fault. Go to him now and tell him you are sorry. Say it whether you are or not. Nobody cares whether an apology is true or not, so that it is spoken out."

"It will never be spoken out in this case," remarked Trenham, coolly.

"Then take the consequences; you deserve them. Now what about Gaveston's daughter? Are you going away burdened with promises to *her*?"

"I do not understand you," said Trenham, with a certain quiet haughtiness which was natural to him.

"Yes, you do. Don't be a coward,"

muttered his uncle, turning the paper over noisily, while his shrewd eyes glittered behind his glasses; "I saw for myself how things stood last night. Now, tell me how things stand to-day."

"I have told Mr. Gaveston," said Rourke, unwilling to quarrel with the old man in this last interview, "how dearly I love Una, and he has consented to give her to me for my wife. So on my return we shall be married."

"Be married, eh? And settle at Hohve, I suppose!"

"Why, where else should we be likely to settle, Uncle Digby?"

"And turn out the old lady and her commander-in-chief?"

"Mrs. Trenham will do as she likes," said Rourke; "either live with us or at Clarehill, as all the dowager Mrs. Trenhams have done before. The lease will have run out in a year's time, and of course she will not allow the place to be let again."

"Won't she?" snapped Mr. Surle; "wait and see. Yes, she is sure to do as she pleases, as you say," he added, with his hardest chuckle, while his eyes glanced uneasily up and down the columns of his paper. "Well, in any light, you have been as rash and idiotic in the matter of proposing for Miss Gaveston as in other things. Think better of it while there's time. Gaveston is a comparatively young man still, and may have a whole family of healthy boys to come between the girl and her fortune."

"What a jolly prospect for him!" laughed Trenham. "And what matter to me? Do you mean to say I need a fortune with my wife? Have not I more than enough for both?"

"Rubbish! get what you can. How can you be sure of anything that lies in other people's fingers? If you had any prudence at all, you would have put up to Vere's sister. She is my godchild, and what more natural than for a man to make his godchild his heiress?"

"Nothing," assented Rourke, readily "I hope you will, for I believe——"

"What?" questioned the generous godfather sharply.

Rourke had been going to say, "For

believe she expects it." But he called back the words in time. "I believe she will make good use of it," he substituted coolly. "I know her brother would."

"Of course she will ; of course," muttered Digby. "But you might have reaped the benefit of it too. It's not too late. Retract your word to Una Gaveston, and I will make it all straight with her father. That is my advice to you ; and I am an old man whose advice it would be all the better for you youngsters to follow."

"Possibly, in some cases," said Trenham, half in scorn, half in sheer amusement at the idea. "Have you any other tempting item of advice to offer, Uncle Digby ?"

"No ; you follow those two, and you will be all right. Make an offer of your hand to my goddaughter, and go home now and make up that quarrel with Horton Newley."

"Quarrel !" echoed the young man, with cutting scorn ; "would I *quarrel*, do you think, with a servant in my house ?"

"Your fine-sounding speeches are about the silliest mistakes you make," remarked Mr. Surle, contemptuously, from behind his paper.

"At any rate, it is no new sensation for me to have every word and action condemned by you," said Trenham, carelessly. "How glad you must be now to feel that after this visit the exertion will be unnecessary for you for two years."

"I don't care a farthing about it either way," snapped the old man. "I have always some one to worry me. What advantage for me to think that for two years it will be some one else instead of you ? Go home now, and shake hands with the man in power."

"If that is all the parting advice you give me, I need not, at any rate, feel oppressed by my sense of obligation to you," said Trenham, coldly.

"Bah ! A little humility would serve you in better stead than all these nonsensical efforts at masterdom—which fail so dismally."

"If it were not that Una always speaks so kindly of you," said Una's lover, hot and angry, "I don't think I should ever care to

mention your name, or hear it mentioned, though you *are* my mother's brother."

"She speaks kindly of me, does she ?" questioned Mr. Surle, in a complacent tone, though a gleam of something like contempt shot from his eyes.

"Indeed she does. God bless her for it, as well as for all her other pure, kind faults."

"Mawkish, it strikes me," muttered Digby, bending closely over his paper now.

"You may go. There's only one thing on earth more nauseous than the company of a pair of lovers, and that's the society of one of them alone. You can go and relieve yourself by declaiming her praises in the open air. Good morning."

There were a few more good-byes for Rourke to say (even more what old Digby would have called senseless and useless ceremonies) ; still he reached Hohve in time for his stepmother's lunch, as he had wished to do. But it was not laid for those two alone. Newley was there ; and, even when the meal was over, Mrs. Trenham persistently avoided being alone with her stepson. If she were so for a few minutes, she kept him engrossed on some topics of her own.

Rourke whispered to her, earnestly, to come out with him, but she turned the remark aside ; and he saw then, beyond a doubt, how she shrank from any interview with him. But he never guessed that she would let her farewell be spoken at the last minute in the great hall ; the carriage waiting to take him to the station, a group of servants lingering about, and Horton Newley writing at a table near them ; a farewell which she knew was to stretch through two whole years, and which might stretch through two whole lives.

"Come back into your room a moment, mother. Don't give me my parting kiss before this crowd of gaping idiots."

Mrs. Trenham passed by the pettish yet pleading words as if she had not heard them ; and every lingering thought of affection in Rourke's heart was stifled now.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, putting her arms about his neck and kissing him, with a sob which did her infinite credit, as expressing almost exactly what she intend-

ed it to express ; "take care of yourself, and write often ; and——"

"All right," put in Rourke, as an interruption to the stereotyped phrases.

And—too honest to pretend that this public farewell was anything but a revolting ceremony to him—he coolly and gently disengaged himself from the arms and lips which had enticed his father into injustice, and held in themselves a power for injustice still.

"Good-bye all of you," he added, turning and glancing pleasantly among the group at the back of the hall.

"Newley."

The steward rose involuntarily at the call. He had advanced to Rourke, and taken his offered hand, before it struck him, with a sharp sting of remorse, how promptly and naturally he had obeyed the simple, authoritative summons.

"Don't you write to me for any instructions about the estate," said Trenham, his voice so clear and pleasant that it was almost impossible to detect the satire. "If you do, I shall not trouble myself to send them. You are the very soul of generosity and the very pink of cavaliers, so I need not suggest your occasionally looking after the poor old folks about the place, and making yourself universally agreeable among our county neighbors."

Calm and cool—though he could only too keenly detect the satire of both remarks—Newley received the young squire's hand-shake, and met his glance of ironical amusement. The listeners would all consider the words genuine, and so it would be wise, he thought, for him to answer them as if they were.

Then Rourke—a laugh upon his face now, where there had been all the morning, stronger than ever, the look of restless longing peculiar to it—shook hands heartily with two or three of the older servants, who came forward in their privilege of having known the young squire from his birth or childhood ; and then went slowly down the three wide shallow flights of steps, and took his seat in the waiting carriage. Five minutes afterwards the young master of Hohve had looked his last upon his beautiful old home.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was the afternoon of a September day two years afterwards.

The Dover train had just panted into London, and had deposited, among its other passengers, a young man, tall and stalwart, with the sun-dyeing of many climates on his keen, handsome face. Upon the platform outside the crowd, another gentleman stood waiting for another train ; waiting leisurely, no luggage in his care but the walking-stick on which he leaned, as he glanced about with the calm, concentrated gaze of a man who thinks much. Suddenly a glance and smile of unfeigned pleasure and surprise lighted up his face ; a quick, glad exclamation burst from his lips.

"Why, Trenham ! Is it really you ?"

For it was Rourke who had first caught sight of Dr. Vere, and was standing before him now ; dusty and travel-soiled enough, but with a bright gladness in his voice and face which had no dryness and no taint about it, but sparkled like a draught of clear Moselle.

"Athol, dear old fellow, how glad I am to see you here ! It could hardly have been better, even if you had come on purpose to meet me. Where were you going ?"

"Down to Hampton House."

"To Hampton House ?" echoed Rourke, laughing. "To an empty house ? What a ghostly idea ! No, you are coming with me to dine. I'm as hungry as a tramp, and as thirsty as Falstaff. You *can* come, Vere ?"

"It would be a strong force to make *it* cannot," said Dr. Vere, smiling as the old boyish wistfulness glanced out in the last question.

"That's glorious. Now we are ready Brent is sure to have secured a cab. He is quicker even than he used to be. Now," he added, when Brent had closed the cab door, "tell me all about home."

But Athol talked very little about home after all ; only questioning Rourke until the servants had withdrawn after dinner and left them alone over their wine in private room at the hotel.

"Really, Vere," Rourke said then, "

have told you hundreds of things about myself and most knowingly refrained from asking private questions before the men. I surely deserve my reward; tell me everything. Why did you say you were going down to Hampton House just when I had so luckily found you? Were you really intending to spend the evening in a deserted mansion? Mrs. Farrissey is dead; did not Una tell me about her odd will, and how the house was not to be let again?"

"No; it is not let. The house, like the property, is in the hands of Mrs. Farrissey's old solicitor, Mr. Lucas. But it is always supposed to be at the service of the Gaveston's when they choose to come to town; and Mr. Gaveston and his daughters are here now."

"*They* here!" exclaimed Rourke, red-den in his gladness. "What good news! Still, it is an odd time for them to choose for London."

"Mr. Gaveston is here on business," said Dr. Vere, as he slowly sipped his wine; "and he brought Una and Lorraine."

"Lorraine!" echoed Rourke, with the old quizzical smile in his eyes. "She has survived the blow then—the failure of her great expectations. Why, she was always supposed to be her aunt's heiress, wasn't she?"

"I think she never felt it as a blow," said Athol, paring a little golden rennet with the greatest care and attention.

"It was an infamous will," *I* think, rejoined Trenham; "the most infamous will I ever heard of."

And Athol said (what was quite true) that Rourke's experience of infamous wills was at present limited.

"There were a good many odd bequests though, weren't there?"

"Yes. The two lazy carriage-horses were to be shot, to prevent any one else overworking them. Every servant had a ten-pound note; and Lloyd, the butler, and Croft, my cousin's own maid, were to receive each fifty pounds a year on condition—but only on condition—that they married each other. If they chose to remain single, or meditate other matches, they were not to receive a farthing."

"But was not there a legacy left to the monkey—or something equally absurd?"

"Draco's legacy was not so absurd as it sounds. Lorraine is to be his guardian, and he is to receive, through her, a hundred a year pocket-money for his life; do you see?"

"Ah! that reads a little differently. But that is, after all, a poor substitute for Mrs. Farrissey's entire fortune, which is lying idle now, eh?"

"Yes; old Mr. Lucas is to keep it all in his own hands—I mean the power, not the cash, which I believe is well invested—and the house, just as it is until——"

"Until what?" asked Rourke, stopping with a filbert between the nut-crackers, and glancing laughingly across the table at Athol when he paused.

"Until Lorraine Gaveston is engaged to be married; or——"

"Or what? Has taken the veil of old maidenhood?" questioned Rourke, lightly, still with his gay eyes on Athol's face.

"Or *I* am about to be married."

The nut-crackers fell on Rourke's plate with a crash. He sprang from his seat like a boy, and cut a caper on the hearth-rug.

"Splendid! splendid, old fellow!" he cried, in his rich quick tones; "I know you would not have told me, if you had not felt sure that Una would. Why, that was the tid-bit of the document. And the mysteries are to be unfolded *then*, are they? Well, dear fellow, I hope they will not long have to lie in the impenetrable keeping of Lucas of the law. I wonder whether your engagement will come first or little Lorraine's. Little Lorraine! I always say involuntarily, as if she were a child for always. Or I wonder whether—look up, man; I want to read it in your face—whether they will come together."

Athol did look up, and answered Rourke's laugh with a laugh of his own too; but, for all that, he could not for another moment keep his secret hidden from the eyes that were as shrewd as they were loving.

"I see, Athol," he said, in a tone of hearty sympathy; "and from my soul I can say I'm glad at the prospect. It will be as if you married my own sister; and

Heaven knows that, if I had one, I should tell her that she had chosen wisely to choose you. I shall tell Lorraine so."

Vere glanced up in quick, proud pain. "Don't mention such a thing to Lorraine," he entreated hurriedly. "She would despise me, if she thought I had let you imagine us betrothed. Rourke, let me tell you the simple fact, it will need but few words; for it is a *very* simple one."

Rourke had drawn up a chair beside his friend now, and was sitting astride upon it; his arms folded on the back, his eyes intent and listening.

"I have loved Lorraine since she was a little thing, no higher than the chair you are leaning on. I cannot tell for what I loved her; I cannot tell why such love should grow in my heart for a child, when I—even then—was a man with a man's cares. But that it did grow there, and has increased and deepened year by year, I know by—by every hope I build, and every pain I have to stifle."

"And does she not know this, Athol?"

"I think she does; because I think no girl could be the very light of a man's eyes, and the very heart of a man's life, *without* knowing it."

"I cannot tell," replied Rourke, thoughtfully; "I have never studied any girl but Una, and from the very first I always told her how I loved her. I did not leave much for her to guess, not I."

Athol smiled. "It has been very different for you," he said; "different always. How could I take Lorraine to such a home as mine? How could I make her bright young life a cramped, penurious one such as my wife's will be—for a time, at any rate?"

"It strikes me," remarked Rourke, composedly, "that your wife might be very happy, Vere; not only presently, when you are a rich and prosperous and famous man; but now too, while you are struggling to that end."

"Years ago I used to feel quite certain that the prosperity you speak of would be mine some day," said the young physician with patient sadness; "but it seems impossible now. When a man gets to four-and-thirty—working hard yet never rising—those

pleasant boyish hopes desert him. If could but buy a practice I believe I could maintain it—yes and increase it too. Som how I feel, through all, that I possess the power. But that cannot be, and struggling against the tide of poverty and energetic opposition is too hard for myself alone for me ever to ask another to share it."

"Is your sister a wiser housekeeper than she used to be?" inquired Rourke bluntly.

"So you can but acknowledge," continued Athol, passing by this remark, "that my love-dream is a most unlikely one ever to work its own fulfilment."

"Then you have never *told* Lorraine how you love her?"

"Never, of course."

"Suppose you did, and she said, 'I know, Athol; I've known it for years, and of course I should have let you see if you love had been distasteful to me?'"

Athol rose, laughing nervously. "You speak like a woman almost, Rourke," he said; "or like a man of wide experience in such matters. No; I do not think my stupid, hopeless, persistent love is distasteful to her. She has always, unconsciously, shown me that it is pleasant to her, but—so terribly natural and brotherly."

"Rubbish!" laughed Rourke, rising too, and strolling leisurely after him to the window. "Just because you are a second cousin, or some other dim relation it is natural only inasmuch as she would consider it very *un-natural* to be without it; but why should she imagine it brotherly? Why, she does not even know what a brother's love is. Has she any other suitor?"

Vere looked up with quick surprise. The question seemed to have struck him oddly. "No; I believe not. Why?"

"Because I see nothing else that need cause you uneasiness. There is no excuse for a man's not winning if he enters the lists in time. Don't you know that the man that hath a tongue, I say, is no match if with that tongue he cannot win a woman?"

"The tongue, then, is the winning member, is it?" asked Athol, as he looked int

the steadfast, dark blue eyes which met his.

"Of course. And I heartily indorse Valentine's statement. Well, then, the love once gained, what is there to fear? Women are so wonderfully faithful. Our love, firm as we feel it, is less constant than theirs, I believe, *always*."

"Do you?" said Vere, thoughtfully.

"But, even taking all this as you say, even wildly imagining that Lorraine could love me enough, or could love me in the kind of way to consent to be my wife—how mad the words sound!—could I for a moment dream that Mr. Gaveston would give one of his daughters to me, to live from hand to mouth, one may say, as I do—debts accumulating round me, and my home so pitifully unlike his own?"

"If I recollect aright," rejoined Trenham, laughing; "Mr. Gaveston is not entirely devoted to his younger daughter. Perhaps, as he feels no strong paternal affection, he will advance no strong paternal scruples. By the way, Vere," he added, with a sudden change of tone, "tell me about this girl, who was such a little rebel in her youth, and whom you loved even then. How much younger is she than Una?"

"Four years. She is nineteen now, and Una twenty-three."

"Four years between her and Una; four years between Una and me. Has she grown at all like Una?"

A laugh broke involuntarily from Athol's lips. "You will see," he said.

"But will you not describe her to me? Why, most men are delighted to have the opportunity of enumerating the beauties of the ladies of their love. I know I could sit here for a whole hour, expatiating on Una's sweet face. Shall I?"

"You are going to do far better," rejoined Athol, quietly; "you are going to see it."

"And you slip out of your part by adding that I shall see Lorraine too, and be able to judge for myself. No," he added, musingly, as he moved to ring the bell; "I do not suppose the sisters ever could grow much alike. I never could imagine any resemblance to Una in that dark little

fiery thing with the flashing eyes. Uncle Bartle may well call her gipsy. Athol, are you sure you have told me exactly how *he* is?"

"Quite sure. How delighted he will be to see you, Trenham! When do you go down?"

"Oh! not yet. I am not due at home yet. I have come so far on my way to Scotland. I promised an old college chum to join him there for a little this month. He said he thought the promise binding, so I came. Are you ready now?"

As the young man passed through the hall, Dr. Vere caught sight of Brent's expression of anxious, mute inquiry.

"Rhoda is very well, Brent," he said, turning on the hotel step, and speaking in his quiet, pleasant way. "Poor old Miriam, I'm sorry to say, is ailing sadly."

"And Rhoda tends her well, sir?"

Athol winced a little at the proud, confident question.

"Rhoda tends her. I saw Rhoda yesterday, and she was looking very pretty."

Andrew's face was in a glow of pride and delight, but Rourke missed either some tone in the uttered words, or some words that might have been uttered.

"Is the girl true to my poor fellow there?" he asked, as the hansom took them rapidly towards Hampton House.

"Remember what you, yourself, have just been telling me," replied Vere, turning the question aside, "that women are much more constant than we are."

"After Miriam, I intend Brent to have the Winterfield Lodge," said Rourke. "It is a pretty and convenient house, and he and his wife will be as happy as the day there. I cannot spare him from his old post, but I will give him what liberty I can. I won't take any other valet in his place, for he is a good, faithful, fellow."

"Old Mr. Surle's eccentricities increase year by year, Trenham," said his friend, turning the subject aside, as he had turned others again and again that afternoon. "I caught him the other day in a back-street in Atton buying a second-hand hat. What do you think of that?"

"It opens a fine prospect for his heir," returned Rourke, laughing.

And then they talked of other things, until they reached Hampton House, and were ushered by Lloyd, the old butler (he had dutifully married Mrs. Farrissey's maid, and was able to receive the double annuity quarterly), into the sombre drawing-room which was still sacred to the memory of Mrs. Cecilia Farrissey and Draco.

"Mr. and Miss Gaveston were dining at Mr. Lucas's," he said, as he turned on the gas and struck a match. "Miss Sheffield was staying in Kensington. Miss Lorraine was at home alone. Should he give any name besides Dr. Vere?"

"Suppose we go up unannounced," said Athol. "I generally do."

"All right," returned Rourke, with utter negligence.

"How provoking that Una should be out!" he added, in a low tone to Athol, as he sauntered behind him up the stairs.

"They have gone to a house near here, and where very early hours are kept," Athol answered. "So your patience will not be long tried."

As he finished speaking, he tapped at a door in the lobby; and when a voice answered, leisurely and rather absently, "Come in," he opened the door, and stood back for Trenham to enter first.

A small room, sombre in its furniture, but made dazzlingly, indeed at first rather painfully, radiant, by the four gaslights burning to their fullest extent, and a strong-minded wood-fire glowing and crackling and blazing, as if it felt put upon its honor to comport itself as would a country wood-fire under the same circumstances. A girl kneeling on the rug before this sturdy fire, replenishing it gingerly, and basking in its warmth, and looking as if she loved it.

"Why, Lorraine, a fire to-day!"

"No, not to-day; to-night," the girl said, coolly, while she scientifically inserted a splinter between the bars. "Athol, what a pity you are come, because everybody is out. There, that burns splendidly. If I don't have an immense amount of light in these rooms, you know, and cheery fires when I am alone here, I feel—" she was slowly rising now, and shaking the crumbs of wood from her dress, "as if I had the

old times clinging about me still. These rooms were always dull and dim and cheerless then; and when I am here alone, I feel as if I had come back to the old life—unless I make an enormous amount of light and warmth and noise. So I have to build up a fire, and turn on the gas, and sing, and laugh, and let Joan come in, and—*Athol*—"

The word was uttered in a tone quite new that night to Athol, from the lips whose every tone and accent he thought he knew so well. She had risen and turned to greet him, and he had taken her hand in his; but her eyes were gone from his face to the face beyond him, and were resting there in a strange, wide, wistful questioning.

And Rourke? He had not claimed acquaintanceship, nor greeted her, nor spoken. He had only *seen* her.

"Do you forget him?" asked Athol, laughing as he glanced from the girl's face to Rourke. "He thought you would not."

"I do not," she answered, quietly; and then a sudden blush darted for an instant across her face; and Rourke Trenham saw that the eyes which he had called flashing, could be soft, too, and liquid as a child's.

"Una will soon be home," she said, with a coolness whose genuineness neither of the young men doubted; "I thought she was fortunate when she went away: she will not think so now, will she?"

"May we wait until then?" asked Rourke. "Do you think us great bores for coming just now—or rather, I should say, do you think *me* a great bore?"

"It is as much Athol's home as it is mine," said Lorraine, lightly, "and as much yours, Mr. Trenham, as his. Will you have tea with me?"

"Thank you. I see a magnificent method of improving that fire," said Rourke, taking up the tongs.

All his old ease had returned to him now, yet he was still—unconsciously to himself—avoiding Athol's eyes.

"I don't mind about it any longer," said Lorraine, smiling as she came close behind him on the hearth to ring the bell. "I am not alone now, and could not fancy the old life back again—even if the fire and the lights all went entirely out."

Rourke had only need to turn his head just a little. He did it, of course.

"Could not re-people the room with Draco and the three dummies who were invoked for a rubber, eh? You see I remember. Shall we have a rubber after tea, with one dummy instead of three?"

"Oh! no, no, please," she said, shrinking from him a little; "I hate whist; hate it just as much as if I were a ruined gambler. The very thought of it brings back, so vividly and so miserably, the weary emptiness of my old life."

"Why think of it *ever*?" he asked; "your life now, and for the future, cannot be weary or empty. The past will be more than made up to you."

He had not intended to speak so earnestly. He had turned to her quite coolly, but somehow his voice and his eyes took the power from him, and gave the words an earnestness of their own.

"Two more cups, Joan; and ask Croft to send up something nice, as I have visitors to tea."

The prim, rosy-cheeked maid (who could not only say her catechism now, but could read it too) executed a courtsey for Dr. Vere's benefit, and retired under the weight of curiosity as to who the other gentleman could be. And the other gentleman, turning with his back to the fire, watched Lorraine as she moved about the room or stood to talk with himself or Athol. But it is almost as hard to describe the girl he watched as it was for him to make it clear to himself *why* he watched her with such intentness.

Lorraine Gaveston was nineteen, as Dr. Vere had said, and tall and rounded with a woman's perfect grace, yet there was an inexplicable childishness lingering about her still. Rourke felt its presence without understanding it. He had been conscious of it in her first question, "Will you have tea with me?" knowing that from others the words would have sounded brusque and curt, while from her they had the wooing tone of a child's entreaty.

Her face had altered beyond his knowledge since he had seen it half buried in the hay; yet, for all that, he recognized something in its expression which took

him, with a leap, back through those seven years, and told him that the nature of the child was the nature of the woman still. In her slow, graceful movements to-night, the perfect apparent ease of her manner, and the grave earnestness of her hospitality—so deftly and courteously exercised through all the merriment and laughter—Rourke could never have guessed that this was the first time it had ever fallen to her lot to "entertain a stranger." Ah! quite as little could he have guessed then how far and how fatally she had succeeded.

She had still the lustrous eyes and clear brunette complexion which had, in her childhood, won Mr. Bartle's pet name; and still the smile and frown were as quick to chase each other on the "gipsy" face as they had been then; but what a brilliant beauty it wore now! And of the power such beauty gave her, the girl had grown up unconscious.

"See, Mr. Trenham, we are waiting for you."

Lorraine, standing beside her chair, turned to Rourke and disturbed him in his thought and gaze. He started and came forward, drawing his chair as near to the tray as he could. "What perfectly lovely eyes she has!" he was thinking; "they are soft and wistful as a child's, and yet one cannot look into them without feeling their extraordinary and inexplicable contradictions. I believe there lies a marvellous passionate power in their depths. I wonder whether Vere often sees it."

"You had evidently forgotten me, Mr. Trenham."

The girl spoke a little nervously, as she handed Rourke his cup, and the words recalled him to himself at once.

"I was trying to recollect," he said, with all his easy coolness, "whether there had not been something different about your hair in those days, I mean that day, of our early acquaintance."

"I think so, indeed," said Lorraine, with a bright laugh. "Aunt Farrissey had my hair cropped every month. I remember feeling particularly jealous of yours because it looked curly, and made mine feel all the more straight and limp and croppy."

"It is very long and beautiful now."

The radiant eyes turned from his face, vexed, it would seem, at the plainly spoken words. "Tell me, Athol," said the girl, defying the soft color which would rise to her cheeks, why did you not dine with Mr. Lucas, as you *were* coming to London? I heard him ask you."

"I refused at the time, and then forgot all about it. So thoroughly forgot it that Rourke and I expected to find you all here to-night."

"I am so sorry."

Some quick words rose to Rourke's lips; but he strangled them there in time, as he had to strangle others during the evening. He had not fancied it to be half over, when Mr. Gaveston and Una returned.

"I must be first to tell Una," cried Lorraine, darting hurriedly from the room.

"She knows what good news it will be, Trenham," said Athol, almost as if in nervous explanation of her departure; "and I want to speak to Mr. Gaveston for a minute before he comes up."

Rourke knew well enough why they left him. The meeting of lovers after nearly a two years' separation is not generally made a public spectacle. He stood on the rug waiting for Una, his heart beating restlessly, his thoughts in a wild, pained confusion.

She came in a little shyly—pretty and fair and dainty in her white dinner dress—and nestled in Rourke's arms with a speechless, calm content; but though he pressed her greedily to his heart, its beatings neither ceased nor hurried.

"Let me look at you, my dear," he said, and held her at arm's length, and gazed long and hungrily into her face. It was just the face of the old days—hardly more womanly, for Una had been grave and womanly even as a child—and while the bright pink blushes came and went, he kissed her again and again, whispering that it was good to see her once more; but the longing and yearning of his eyes were still there, unhidden and unconquered.

That night after the young men had left Hampton House, Lorraine sat alone in the room in which she had made tea for them. Joan opened the door at last, and looking inquisitively in, roused her from her long thought,

"Please to come to bed, Miss Lorraine; it's so late, and I want to brush your hair."

"Is it late? Then go to bed yourself, Joan. Never mind my hair."

As she spoke and the door closed again, she brought a lock round with her fingers and looked at it.

"Long and beautiful," he said; and why should he say it, and why should I care? Now Una's is pretty, of course—almost golden, and so bright, and always neat, while mine—Why did he say it was like Mignon's? Who is Mignon? I must ask Una."

And while the resolution was fresh upon her, she went to her sister's room and asked the question.

"Mignon! Oh! she is the heroine in *Wilhelm Meister*. She falls terribly in love with him as a child, and loves him all through."

"Unasked? I mean—I mean without his caring for her?"

"Yes; in *that* sort of way," replied Una, speaking softly from the height of her happy experience. "He was kind to her always, and nothing more. But she loved him passionately, and—I forget it exactly, but I think her love killed her. We will read it together—shall we, dear?—in the German."

"No! I don't think I shall like it."

Una was sitting in her dressing-gown, reading the Evening Psalms, wrapped in sort of deep, quiet happiness. Lorraine bending from behind to kiss her, caught the two faces in the glass opposite.

"Una!" she cried, throwing her arm around her sister with a shiver; "how different we are! what a happy, fairy, angel girl you are! and I——"

"And you," said Una, smiling tenderly up into the lovely eyes; "shall I tell you what some one said of you to-night?"

"No! I'm tired of all Mr. Lucas' speeches."

Una laughed. "I did not say it was Mr. Lucas," she said, and then turned the subject aside. "Lorraine, it was too bad of you to go away without telling me what you thought of Rourke. Tell me now what was pleasant at tea, before I came?"

"Lazy, rather," said Lorraine, wit

gentle *nonchalance*, as she stood behind her sister's chair; her eyes still absently fixed upon the glass.

"Was he? I don't think him lazy."

"But you weren't there."

"Oh! I see what you mean. Did the time seem long to him, do you think?"

"It allowed him to take an immense amount of tea. He asked for half a cup at last, which, of course, I didn't give him; and he hoped men would get half-cups of tea in heaven, as they never could on earth."

"He often says random things," exclaimed Una, apologetically; "and he says them so calmly that one almost thinks he means them; and he looks as if he did, doesn't he? He looks quite calm even when his passions are most stirred," she added, speaking from her so-far acquired experience.

"Does he? Was it he papa was speaking of to-night, when I came in, who had 'firmness of nerve and energy of thought'?"

"Yes. I never noticed it exactly; but of course papa knows. But don't you think, Lorraine, that, though Rourke looks so strong, and so careless, and so fearless, as it were, there is an intense refinement in his face; even more so than in Athol's, though Athol is so delicate and gentle?"

"A different sort," rejoined Lorraine.

"In Rourke Trenham it is the inherent refinement of high birth and breeding, and—unsullied thoughts, perhaps. What can that have to do with the sun-brown on his face?"

"The charm of his face tells upon you in an instant, doesn't it, Lorraine? And you hardly know where it lies—the charm I call it; Miss Shefford called it the *power*. I don't think I know any one else with eyes like his; do you?"

"I remember!"—Lorraine checked herself; she would not tell her sister that babyish idea about the wet violets. "He has a face which you may well love to look upon, Una," she said, bending until her cheek touched Una's; "but don't let us discuss it any more, my pet. Why should we, when you will have it near you always; and I can see it as often as I need? Don't

let us discuss him in this sort of way ever again."

And they never did.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKFAST just over at Hampton House; Mr. Gaveston gone out, and the girls lingering over the fire in the breakfast-room.

"It is chilly enough," Una said, "to make one appreciate a fire in the mornings and evenings now. The winter has come upon us unawares during Rourke's stay in London."

"Chilly enough," put in Lorraine, basking in the warmth, "to keep one lingering idly over it, instead of being up and doing. What do you intend to be up and doing to-day?"

"Don't you remember that Rourke begged us not to make arrangements for to-day until he came—both of us? He particularly said to me——"

"When he particularly leaves his orders with you, Una?" interrupted the younger sister, "I always know that the spirit of Aunt Farrissey influences the house still. She used constantly and pathetically to tell Athol Vere that I was not to be trusted."

"Why remember such things, Lorraine, dear?" said her sister, smiling; "no one thinks so now. Only a few days ago you told me that all the hardness and coldness of that time were forgotten; and that you could feel no want while we were together."

"So I did," cried Lorraine, bending and laying her lips upon her sister's, "and I meant it too; I quite meant it. Now that's enough about Aunt Farrissey and the old life."

"Yes; because a loving and pleasant one has begun for all of us, has not it?" asked Una, brightly. "And we are so happy. Lorraine," she added after a moment's pause, "you will not refuse again to come with Rourke and me?"

Lorraine leisurely placed one foot upon the fender and looked critically down at it. "I have an appointment at eleven o'clock that will detain me all the morning."

"An appointment, dear! With whom?"

"Don't be inquisitive, Una. With a young person."

"Oh, Lorraine, you could put it off."

"Impossible!"—who could detect a jarring note in the grave, serious voice?—

"And *you* will tell Mr. Trenham this when he comes, if he so much as remembers the part of his request which related to me."

"Don't call him *Mr. Trenham*," pleaded the elder sister, wistfully; "it sounds so strange; and he always feels hurt. I can see it in his face, I can hear in it his voice whenever he answers to your *Mr. Trenham*."

"Rourke, Rourke!"—though repeated so quizzically, the word was still most softly uttered—"how can I call him Rourke? The name is full of corners which I cannot get round."

"Yet we have never been used to speak of him by any other name, have we? Do you dislike it, dear?"

"Yes, it is harsh and hard to say. I should require long practice before I ventured to pronounce it in public."

"I suppose it does sound odd to any one just at first," mused Una; "but papa says there have been Rourke Trenhams from time immemorial; and to me it never seems odd. I suppose because I have grown so used to it; and so—so fond of it," she added, tenderly.

"It is as Irish as *Pat*, and not half so easy to say," remarked Lorraine, tersely.

Una turned her face to the door, blushing brightly. Both the girls had heard a step in the hall, which either of them would have known among a hundred.

"Lorraine," whispered Una, with eagerness, "you will not say *Mr. Trenham* again. Promise me before he comes; promise me."

"I promise," said her sister steadily.

Then Rourke came in; and, while Una went forward to meet him, Lorraine knelt down upon the rug, and held her hands outstretched before the fire, shivering a little.

"Cold, Lorraine! How can it be on such a day as this? Come out, and feel how hotly the sun glares down upon the streets."

Rourke was standing beside her now, *waiting for her to rise and greet him*; his

hand held towards her; his eyes resting upon her bent head.

"I believe you never felt cold in your life," she said, rising with great deliberateness, and carelessly meeting the gaze of his warm blue eyes. "It is most provoking, and reminds me of old days when I used to chafe against the fires Aunt Farrissey kept here, and she used to say the *atmosphere* was warm. Warm! *This* house warm!"

"Come with us," urged Rourke, watching with a pained intentness the passing cloud upon her lovely face. "I will take you for a beautiful drive, and you shall own that it is warm and pleasant out of doors."

"No, thank you; I cannot."

"Why *cannot*? How is it that you stay at home perpetually now; yet—yet seem just as restless as you were years ago. How many years ago?"

"I forget," Lorraine said, lightly. And then, oblivious of her previous complaint of the cold, she put up both her hands to screen her face from the blaze.

"You will come, Lorraine? You will not let me—you will not let us have always to ask in vain?"

"She says she has an appointment," put in Una, grieving to see Rourke hurt by her sister's refusal; "an important one; and she will not explain with whom, or for what; I cannot guess either. I should have fancied it to be with Mr. Lucas, Aunt Farrissey's lawyer, but that he is coming to dine with us this evening."

"Is he! I *am* glad," cried Lorraine, an unaccountable tone of relief in her voice.

"Because he pays you compliments?" inquired Rourke, with a swift cloud of anger on his brow; "constant, hackneyed compliments."

"Because he likes me," said the girl demurely; knowing that they would neither of them guess why the old lawyer's company was a relief to her. "When he first saw me here he called me *my dear*. I think—I think at first I didn't even understand what it meant. What a long, long time ago that was!"

"He is the veriest old proser I ever met," said Rourke, testily; "I wonder

you care for him or his worn-out compliments."

"I like him exceedingly; and his worn-out compliments still more exceedingly."

"With his short tuft of white beard, he looks as if he had had a snowball thrown at his florid face, and it had stuck at the point of his chin. You were evidently no judge of beauty in your youth, or no admirer of it."

"I was *both*," she answered, slowly letting her eyes meet his, for he could not read the proof which lay far down behind their laughter. "One thing, though, used to puzzle me sorely about Mr. Lucas. One of the beautiful figures in the great stained window at our church here has *Lucas* under it; and whenever Mr. Lucas was at church, I used to spend the whole time of service staring from it to him, and wondering why everybody's portrait wasn't taken in that handsome way; he looked so much better there than in his photograph; quite a different man, as one might say."

"Quite. His face is not pre-eminently apostolic," remarked Rourke. "Is he a widower?"

"Why should he be a widower? He has never married yet. He has had his share of love-adventures, though, and delights in telling them. His favorite one is an account of his falling in love with a Devonshire lady, and going down there to stay for a time on purpose to propose to her. They walked out together every day, in the most flowery and retired lanes, but he never could be sure of the weather, he says, and knew he couldn't comfortably finish up a proposal under an umbrella. So he did not begin it, and she married some one else."

"He was not of Sir Peter Vaughan's opinion, was he, Lorraine?" asked Una, archly. "Rourke, what do you think of little Sir Peter having fallen absurdly in love with Lorraine as soon as ever she came home? And one rainy day he rushed after her with his umbrella, and held it over her all the way home, while he proposed to her there and then."

"He is twice her age, and more," said Rourke, turning aside, while a scarlet tide rushed across his face, to Una's amused

surprise, "and the greatest coxcomb in England."

"The smallest, you mean," put in Lorraine, parenthetically; "and never mind his age; he doesn't look a day more than twenty: a slim and beardless boy."

"And behaves as one too. But what else could one expect from a man who was the only son of his mother, and she was an idiot?"

"He quoted whole verses of one of his songs," continued Lorraine, with gravity. "It was something about 'we two,' and it made no mention of the umbrella, I remarked, though that was, after all, the principal feature in the scene. He is almost as good as Jaques for sucking melancholy out of a song."

"He wou'd fluently out in the rain then?" questioned Rourke, without a smile.

"Very. In those moist surroundings, he gave me a warm and glowing description of a villa he has somewhere, where it never rains."

"He has a keen sense of the fitness of things. It reminds one of the open-air preacher who—when it was very cold, and he feared that the idea of a fire might be irresistibly attractive to his perished hearers—declared that hell was a region of snow and ice."

"I have not told you yet," smiled Una, "what Lorraine said in answer to him."

"Poor Vaughan! Poor simpleton!"

"Una, why did you tell this ridiculous story?" asked Lorraine, with a sudden desolate appeal in her eyes, as she turned away from Rourke's gaze. "It was so very silly, and—and I don't like talking of these things."

"Come with us, and we will not mention Sir Peter's name at all," said Una, tenderly. "Come, a drive will do you so much good. Rourke, tell her so. She is not looking well, is she? Do persuade her to come."

"My persuasions would only ensure a more decided refusal," said Trenham, in a stiff, chill tone. "It has been so ever since I returned."

"Oh, no, Rourke," cried Una, eagerly; "you must not imagine Lorraine is perverse or unkind. She never is. She

thinks—I really believe, Rourke,” added his little *fiancée*, blushing vividly, “that she does not guess how earnestly we mean it when we say we want her.”

“Does not guess?” questioned Rourke, slowly, with a quiet, steady gaze into her eyes; “then how could any word of mine—”

“Almost eleven o’clock?” cried Lorraine, turning from the fire with nervous haste. “Una, you were causing me to forget my appointment; I shall only just be in time now. Don’t you come into my room to disturb me.”

“Lorraine,” whispered her sister, detaining her in the hall, “won’t you stay with Rourke while I just write a line to Miss Shefford before I put on my hat?”

A hurried, frightened negative rose to Lorraine’s lips, but she stifled it, and answered without constraint.

“Rourke is all right, and very comfortable. If he feels you are long, he will go to the garden and have a cigar. I shall listen for your starting in a few minutes’ time. Give me a good-bye kiss here, I shall not see you again until evening.”

“Why not?”

“I mean that I may be out when you return. I—papa and I may go out together this afternoon, you know.”

“Papa will not be home until dinner-time.”

“Make haste,” put in Lorraine, hastily, “we are wasting time here.”

Again the dingy little sitting-room, which had been Lorraine’s school-room—the room which, during this visit to Hampton House, she had so persistently shunned. She sat here now voluntarily and alone, without extra light, or warmth, or sound; yet none of the old memories clung about her; no ghost of the old days haunted her. Sitting with her head thrown back in her clasped hands, she sang to herself as if she would drown some real or fancied sound.

A rap upon the door, and Joan entered, her rosy face assuming even more astonishment than it normally wore, on finding her mistress here alone while there were sounds of merry talk and laughter in the hall below.

Joan was promoted now to be maid to the young mistress, whom, during those past seven years, she had surreptitiously, as it were, grown to love with all her honest heart; and she bore the honor with a certain grave dignity mixed with continual astonishment, which amused Lorraine greatly, and constantly reminded her of that supper of roast fowl upon which they had regaled together.

“Did you ring, miss?”

Lorraine paused in her singing, and turned her grave eyes to the girl.

“Yes; it is eleven o’clock, and I have an appointment with you now—a very important one.”

“Bring my copy-book and things, miss?” inquired Joan, briskly.

“No,” rejoined Lorraine, rather tiredly; “the way I keep this appointment is for you to bring your sewing and sit at the window, while I play, or—do anything.”

So the hours went on; but Lorraine’s solitary occupations were not all-engrossing, and before the morning was over she decided to overlook her maid going through her favorite study of writing a letter to an imaginary friend—a lengthened process for Joan, as she always had to make several copies before perfection was attained. Then the bell rang for the servants’ dinner, and after an hour’s solitude Lorraine was summoned to her lunch in the large, gloomy dining-room. Shivering a little, she took her seat alone at the long table, and began to eat.

Lloyd had permission given him, as he often had now, to resign his duties, she being alone. But it was against his principles ever to take advantage of this childish order, which, nevertheless, he would view leniently from the girl whom he had known as a neglected, unappreciated child. He went through his part of the ceremony with stately composure, and Lorraine tried to assume a stately composure too; but she felt that her effort had no result beyond the placid amusement of Lloyd, who was yet forbearing in his serene contempt. To the restless girl, the room seemed to grow larger and larger, the table longer and longer, herself smaller and smaller; the whole thing more and more ridiculous. “I

could almost," she thought to herself with a laugh, "order up Draco for company."

The meal was over at last, and she was out in the hall.

"Send for a cab for Joan and me, will you, Lloyd? we have to go—to——"

The butler could not catch the end of the sentence; Lorraine had run swiftly upstairs.

"Joan, put on your bonnet at once; I'm going to take you to—I don't exactly know where, but to some pretty country-place where we've never been before."

Joan's excitement at first knew no bounds; but then she dismally remembered that the master had been vexed last time Miss Lorraine had gone out with nobody but her.

"He is not coming home till dinner-time, and I cannot stay in all day," said Lorraine, impatiently, while her bright face saddened; "what else can I do while Miss Shefford is away? Make haste, Joan."

So they went; and when they returned Una told Lorraine that she had been at home for three hours; that she and Rourke had lunched together, and that he had only just left, to return presently to dinner; that they had wondered greatly where Lorraine could be, and had watched eagerly for her all the afternoon.

Lorraine heaved a sigh of relief; rejoicing she had taken that drive with Joan, though it had neither been an intellectual treat, nor otherwise remarkable for enjoyment.

Yet this was but one more day, she said to herself, and there might be many to spend before Miss Shefford returned from Kensington, or Rourke Trenham went to fulfil that promise, which he had told Athol Vere he considered to be a binding one, to his friend in Scotland. Had he forgotten having said so, or thought so? For day after day he lingered in London.

And yet who could feel surprised at Rourke's unwillingness to leave town while his betrothed was there?

CHAPTER X.

THESE autumn days went by on noiseless, sunny wings for Una. She rejoiced with

all her heart over Rourke's constant presence in the sombre London house. If his moods were sometimes uncertain; if he occasionally fell into deep thought, from which, when she gently roused him, he would start with nervous dread, and put himself at her service with a feeling terribly akin to remorse, she (though she scarcely understood) never doubted him; for his moods had used to be odd in their sudden changes, and he was always the Rourke she had loved so long.

So, in her innocently trustful love, she lived encircled by a cloudless happiness; and, seeing its reflection perhaps on other faces, she felt that these Autumn days were gliding by sunnily for every one about her. Perhaps they were so; but the rays dazzled Rourke with an unspeakable pain, and the hands he lifted to ward off their unreal brilliance were feeble and unsteady. And could the sun-rays cheer Lorraine, whose young, fleet footsteps had so early got entangled among "the briers of this work-a-day world"? Ah! to her own pain was added that of seeing Rourke's, and understanding it as she knew that no one must ever understand hers. For the girl, young as she was, had a nature widely, as well as purely, unselfish; and nobly, as well as gently, able to bear.

So, through these days in London, Lorraine was always the cheery confidante of Una's hopes and loving prospects, as well as the quick, intelligent companion her father needed in the constant absence of his eldest daughter. But from Rourke Trenham she had grown to shrink with a fear unguessed-of by any but himself; while even he could never detect that it was herself she feared as much as him; for she let there be no visible avoidance in her behavior, which was so natural and so sisterly that, though at times it charmed him, at other times it half maddened him in his misery. To Athol Vere only was she exactly herself through those few weeks; the wayward, gay, bewitching girl, in whose nature there lurked no taint of vanity or self-love; to whom his grave, lonely heart went out with all its strength and steadfastness. But then he came so seldom.

Thus the time went on, and even when October came in, Rourke's *binding* promise to his friend in Scotland was unfulfilled.

The month was nearly a week old, when Mr. Gaveston one morning, as he left Hampton House, told his daughters to prepare to return home on the following day.

"Lucas and Trenham dine with us this evening," he said, "and to-morrow we leave."

"Then we are to separate again already," sighed Una, when the sisters were alone.

"Rourke will go to Scotland now, and it seems almost harder than the last parting."

"I don't call this a separation," said Lorraine, cheerily; "just a week or so; why, it's nothing. Let us go for a walk, Una. As Rourke is invited to dine, he will not be here this afternoon, and you and I can have a pleasant little excursion together."

"But do you really think he will stay in Scotland only a week?"

Lorraine gave it unhesitatingly as her opinion that, as he had left it so late, he would return on the second day at latest; and with this assurance Una went away smiling, to dress for their excursion. Lorraine followed slowly, musing how soon all things had changed in her thoughts; remembering how a month ago she had dreaded the very mention of the day when Una was to be married and leave her; and yet feeling now that she would give all she possessed if she could know that to-morrow morning Rourke and Una would be wed.

But through the excursion which Lorraine arranged entirely, and to which she gave its zest, she was still bright and prompt, not only with her interest in Una's favorite subject of conversation, but with her encouragement for the coming parting.

Lorraine told no one but herself that all the pleasure had gone for her from the walks and drives with Una which used to be the bright spots in her life; but herself she told, for the girl found it a relief now at times to cry out to herself a reason for her deep-lying misery. It was so hard yet for the untamed spirit and untutored mind to rest in patience under this vague cloud.

"Why, Lorraine," exclaimed Una, when

the girls returned, "we have actually been away three hours. How fast the time went, did it not, while we were enjoying ourselves and talking so much?"

"I think," said Lorraine, smiling gently as she passed up the stairs, "that the last day anywhere always goes fast."

"But the best part of the day is yet to come," added Una gaily. "Now, let me see. There is an hour and a half before dinner. I shall dress at once and finish my volume because the books should go back to Mudie's before we leave. I may as well be in the drawing-room, because I dare say Rourke will come soon."

"In which case you will *not* finish your volume."

"No, not in that case. What shall you do, dear?"

"Dress too. Then practise a little up in my own room—as you always call it; as it used to be in old times."

"Then you will sing to us all down stairs after dinner, won't you?" pleaded Una. "It is too bad that you never do so now."

"I don't sing in public," Lorraine said, smiling into her sister's uplifted face. "You do it so much better, Una darling; I am always grateful to you when you leave off asking me and take the duty (or pleasure) on yourself."

Una expressed no reluctance, for it always gave her a great amount of innocent pleasure to win Rourke's admiration in any way; and she thought it but natural, after all, that her younger sister should still leave it to her to provide him a pleasure which she had been accustomed to provide. Yet she knew that Lorraine—while always considering herself so inferior to her elder sister—had never been one to shrink from venturing in public what she could do in private, and had no false shame in her nature. So the firmly-kept resolution puzzled her not a little.

"Do you know," she said, "that Rourke does not believe you at all when you say you do not sing or play?"

"Yes, he does," Lorraine said, passing on rather hurriedly.

Standing before her glass, when she was dressed, she looked at herself with a long intentness, yet without any of the thoughts

natural to a girl who gazes on her own surpassing beauty. Then she raised her right hand slowly, and took the flowers from her hair. Another look, and then—with a strange feeling that they were the cause of the misery that pressed upon her—she put up her hand once more, and covered the longing dark grey eyes.

Without creating any glare of light, though it was the old school-room and she was alone in it, the girl sat playing to herself in the twilight; singing, too, such fragments of old-fashioned songs as she had been able to glean from Mrs. Farrissey's *répertoire* in old times, and which came more easily to her at such an hour than those modern ones which she had learned at Una's instigation. And, through and below them all, her thoughts went on their own wayward track, and gave the music (it might be) a truer interpretation than a hundred lessons could have done.

"Lost, lost! is my quiet for ever;
Since Henry has left me to mourn;
To forget him, how vain my endeavor,
Alas! will he never return?
Ah! well-a-day, well-a-day!
Ah! well-a-day!

So she was singing, when, into the light beside her, a tall, dim form came with leisurely, soundless steps.

"Lorraine," said Rourke, leaning on the piano opposite her, and gazing at her with sad intentness, "you have told me falsehood after falsehood. What purpose have they served?"

"Oh! *this*," said Lorraine, forgetting even to misunderstand him, as she dropped her hands into her lap; "this is an old song which I've spent hours and hours in practising. You don't suppose I could spend that time over many things, and I must if I pretend to sing at all. You would not have me sing *this* to people?"

"You think," he said, with still the treacherous calm in face and tone, "that I shall like you less if you cannot give me the pleasure which Una does. The falsehoods were all useless, for, without a touch of your fingers or note of your voice, you can give me a pleasure greater than any music in the world could give."

"Have you ever heard my *Æolian harp*?"

asked Lorraine, rising from the music-stool; her face as pale as death, and the straight, delicate brows drawn with unutterable pain. "I will place it now, if you like to listen for a minute."

"Wait."—It was not his tone which stayed her, but the touch of his eager fingers through her thin sleeve.—"Wait and listen to me once—once, if never again. Tell me what I am to do in this great trouble. Oh! child, beloved against my will, against my honor, must it be always this misery, or—?"

"Why did you come up here?" cried the girl, shrinking from him, and covering—with both hands now—the lovely, truth-telling eyes. Una is in the drawing-room. Go there. You have no business to come here. This is my room, only mine. I sit alone here; I—I like to sit alone here."

It was well to cover her eyes while he searched them so.

"Lorraine, is that truth, or another falsehood? For, by heaven! I never know, when I have only your voice to guide me. Of course this is your room; I know it, or I should not have been here now. But you said, a very little time ago, that you hated the memories that it brought when you were here alone. Are even *those* better to you than having me here?"

"Yes."

So cool the word was; so cruelly true-sounding.

"Then I will go." He had made a step or two towards the door, but turned again, moved by something stronger than his will. "You spoke of your *Æolian harp*. Shall I hear it now? I may never be here again."

Lorraine walked hurriedly to the window, and placed the harp; feeling, though she could not see, how his eyes followed her every movement. Then she stood back in the shadow, and the mournful wail swept in between them.

Quite suddenly, in the midst of that silent pause between them, filled by the soft, weird tones which rose and fell in fitful joy and melancholy, Rourke started forward, threw up the sash, and took away the instrument.

"I have stood a good deal; I can stand

a good deal," he said, fiercely; "but not that. To be near you with *something* between us that keeps us whole worlds apart, and with that miserable lamentation mocking one. Why did you put it there? why did you bid me listen?"

"You came in for music," said the girl, speaking very gently; "and this was the best I could give you."

"*Would* give me!"

"I hardly expected you to care for it. I—I only proposed it as a kind of——"

"Of excuse, I know," he said, calmly finishing her broken sentence; "I saw through that excuse as I see daily through a hundred others. And I was fool enough to wait for this treat which you designed for my amusement. I was fool enough, because to be in the room with you—to watch your hands when I cannot watch your eyes, to hear your step when I cannot hear your voice—is bliss for me; a blind and treacherous kind of bliss, as you know." He had come nearer to her now, and stood before her, proud in his strength and earnestness, humble in his love and longing; but his back was to the window, and his face was almost as thoroughly hidden from her as if the dusk of death had been between them. "A blind and treacherous kind of bliss, but the only kind which I can ever know again, I think."

She drew out her watch and turned its dial towards the dying light. "I cannot see it," she said, shaking her head with a smile as she replaced the watch, "but I am sure it must be time for us to go down."

The action and the words seemed full of quiet self-possession, but a woman would have detected the timid self-distrust below them.

"Lorraine," whispered Rourke, stretching both his hands to her from where he stood, "is there *no* hope for me?"

"Why not, Mr. Trenham?" she said, carelessly (she still never called him by his Christian name, save in Una's presence). "I hardly know any one for whom there ought to be more hope."

"My child, my love, I mean——"

"I should not understand what you mean, even if you told me," she interrupt-

ed. "Where was Una when you left the drawing-room?"

"I did not leave it; I never entered it. I came straight up here, hoping I should find you. I listened outside for a few minutes; I should have been there now, and you would have been singing to me—singing to *me*, whether you knew it or not—but that the thought of seeing you made me a fool as usual. Lorraine——"

She was arranging the music on the piano, and did not turn at his call. He waited until she had closed the instrument and was moving towards the door, then he intercepted her; and, seizing both her hands in his, he bent that she must need look in his face.

"Lorraine, is there *no* hope for me? My darling, beloved beyond all words, look into my face a moment and see how fearfully I am in earnest."

She was looking at him, for he obliged her to do so; and her eyes, for all their trying, had a yearning in their depths almost like his.

"Others have seen you in earnest too," she said, very coldly, while her heart lay like lead in her bosom; "I mean others have seen you *really* in earnest. Let me go. I do not care for this idle play."

"Really in earnest?" repeated Rourke, pressing almost savagely the hands he held. "I tell you—I will tell you a hundred times and swear it—that I never——"

"Never intended to insult me when you came up here," interrupted the girl, with simple gravity; "I will believe that. We are to be brother and sister; why should we hurt and estrange each other now with thoughtless, senseless words? Come down to Mr. Lucas and Una, and papa. Miss Shefford is out."

"To-night," Rourke said, with intense quietness, as he dropped her hands, "I shall tell Una all the truth."

"Rourke—oh! Rourke," the cry came from the girl's lips in a sharp whisper which frightened him, though he could not measure its acute and *passionate* pain—"you will never, never do that. Would you kill her? Would you break her loving, trusting heart? Oh! Una, my darling, our father's darling, your chosen

wife, would you wreck her happiness? What is mine worth beside hers? She is frail and delicate, and I am strong. She has been guarded and petted all her life; I am used to neglect and coldness. She has always had happiness and love about her. I—I am not used to it at all. If I thought she was to suffer——”

“Answer me one question,” cried Rourke, with a nervous heaving of his chest, as for one swift minute the truth lay before him, visible in the lightning flash of these unselfish words; “answer me as before Heaven. Dear one, how you shiver! It is chilly here, but we will go down presently into the warmth; into the light and warmth together, you and I. Ah! do not shrink from me; I am the same Rourke in whose hand yours lay so quietly this morning. Did you notice how long and close I held it? There, let me hold it so, just while I ask you this. I cannot read your face, as I love to read it in its truthfulness, and so I want to feel you here beside me. Lorraine, you speak of Una’s unhappiness and your own. Now tell me. Is *this* the choice that lies in my hands to-night? To make Una unhappy or—you.”

“Or me!” The words tottered from her lips; her nervous fingers, hurriedly withdrawn from his, twisted themselves together in their hot pain; but he could only hear the uttered words, “Or me! Do you dream that anything you could do would give *me* suffering?”

“Answer me; answer me from your soul,” continued Rourke, passionately, as the blankness gathered slowly about him again. “Your answer given so—shall decide me. If it is *no*, I will try with all my power to be what I was before I saw you. If it is *yes*, I will pray Una for her pardon, and then I am yours for all my life, Lorraine.”

A moment’s silence, which it was Rourke who broke in his impatience.

“Tell me. I can hardly breathe while I am waiting for the word.”

“Waiting for what word? Oh! I did not understand.” The answer, as Lorraine had foreseen, came all the more coolly and carelessly after the pause. “You were *not* jesting then? I thought you were.”

“Jesting!”

She interrupted the impassioned denial with a laugh.

“Then we will say you were not, if you like, and that you really want an answer to that odd question. Very well then, here it is. The choice that lies in your hands, as you say, is this. To make Una thoroughly unhappy *and* me—thoroughly unhappy, both of us;—or, in making Una happy, to make us both so. Do you quite understand?”

“Yes. I quite understand. You do not care to—you would not even accept my love if I were free to offer it; if I could in all honor lay it at your feet to-morrow, as I have laid it there in my despair to-night.”

“That is quite true. You will be my brother, Rourke, or nothing in the world to me; not even a friend, for I should shun to look upon you again.”

“This is quite true? Lorraine, you would not deceive me when so much depends upon your words?”

“This is quite true,” she answered, strong and steadfast in the merciful darkness.

“Then,” he said, and for a moment both his hands were tight upon his head, “implore Una to let it be at once, or—or let us wait a year, and I will go away again; or oh! Lorraine, what shall it be?”

“We need not decide that to-night, Rourke.” And now she offered him her hand of her own free will. “Let us go down-stairs.”

“It shall all be decided to-night,” he said, moving from before the door, and quietly opening it for her, “to-night before I go away again.”

“You mean before you go home with us to-morrow?” she asked, with as much ease as she could. “Papa said you had decided to give up Scotland, and to go home with us.”

“Did he?” Rourke had not detected the real anxiety hidden in her inquiry, the hope that her father had been mistaken; he only noticed the indifference she displayed both to his coming and his going.

“Oh, yes, of course I am going home. I made all my plans this morning; why

should I change them now? What should have happened since then to make the going home unpleasant to me?"

"What, indeed?" Lorraine said simply.

It seemed an understood thing that all who met at dinner that evening were to go to the country in company on the morrow. Even Mr. Lucas had consented to run down to Rupert's Rest for a few days' change. A few days' shooting, Mr. Gaveston called it; but the old lawyer declared he held too many secrets in his hand to venture it upon the trigger of a gun.

That was an unusually merry night at Hampton House, and Lorraine caught herself wondering how and why it was so. Rourke's random gaiety astonished Una now and then, but hardly for more than a minute at a time. Like every other mood, it sat so easily upon him while it lasted, that she had lost the transient feeling of bewilderment almost as soon as it was conceived. Even to Lorraine, his excitement seemed only a very little unusual. The coolness of his jests, the heartiness of his laugh, the easy courtesy of his manner to her, the promptness of his attentions to Una, blinded even her to the restless excitement running under all.

Lorraine was gay too, in a quaint and fitful way, which was characteristic of her when moved at all, and was probably the result of the training of her childhood; when she had to battle in secret with all its cares, and was keenly made to feel that what to her was so heavy, was to others a trifle—a feeling bitter to a child as any can be to us in after-life, and which only a mother's care can quite prevent.

As usual, she refused to sing, refused to-night even to play Una's accompaniments. Still the evening was apparently a very pleasant one to all, and when the guests rose to leave, Mr. Gaveston exclaimed in his astonishment at the lateness of the hour—a most rare and exceptional proceeding with him.

"This is the sort of evening to scatter the cobwebs from a man's mind, Miss Lorraine," said the old lawyer, with a playful touch upon the cheek of the girl whom he had known as a tiny child.

"By the way, Una," said Rourke, turn-

ing away to hide how jealously his face burned at this slight act, "I asked you particularly *not* to write to Newley, when you acknowledged the hamper of fruit and flowers from Hohve which Mrs. Trenham sent through him. Yet when your father gave me the letters to post to-day in the General Office as we passed, there was one to him. The address looked like your sister's writing; but the hamper was addressed to you, so I presume the letter to have been yours."

Una, looking timidly down, while the tears actually started in her eyes, was beginning to explain how, being in haste, she had begged Lorraine to address the envelope at her dictation, when the younger sister put in her own words, too quickly for Una's to be of the slightest avail.

"That was my letter, Rourke; you don't suppose Una would care to write to your steward after what you had said."

The young man looked at her with searching scrutiny.

"And you would?"

"Yes."

No word to show a suspicion of the truth of this; no opportunity given Una to contradict; only a great hot anger in his eyes.

"I saw the address, 'Horton Newley, Esq., Hohve.' Nothing between:—Esquire of Hohve! it carries a rank of its own. Why, you could fancy him the master there, seeing a letter so addressed to him from one of Mr. Gaveston's daughters. Have you written often so to my mother's steward?"

"Not very often."

The inimitable coolness of the reply wounded him sorely in his petulance.

"While one sister is writing to Rourke Trenham, the other sends to Horton Newley; and, except for the names alone, both bear the same title and address. By Heaven! it would be hard to tell which reads like master."

"Have there ever been Newleys o Hohve?" inquired Lorraine, demurely.

Rourke's first inclination was to retort angrily, his second to laugh frankly at the absurd idea.

"What a maddening girl you are, Lorraine," he said; "you work one up into a

passion, then bring one tamely out one's own discomfiture."

ould he own how impossible it was to keep his resentment against her, or she should do or say, because he r with the warmest and strongest of his heart?

fly, you will do exactly what you says," he added. "But, Una, or you want a message sent to one servants, you will send it through her or myself, I hope."

Trenham always likes me to treat

't excuse me, Una," put in Lorterrupting her sister's approach to n. "I think it most natural to edge a hamper of fruit to the persends the letter with it. Rourke, lendid gardens you must have at

do you mean," exclaimed Trenonished, "that you have really n them?"

er."

you will; a hundred and a thoues."

ger confidence of his tone raised ash to Una's cheek; but Lorraine, understanding why, was glad to out answering to Mr. Lucas, who ent joined the group to say good-

ll meet you at Paddington," he id very glad I shall be to turn my he city, for a day or two. Conglad you will be too, Mr. Trenendon has been unbearably dull came, hasn't it?"

!" echoed Rourke, with a laugh. it had been."

t an absurd speech I made, Miss n't I?" laughed the old lawyer, But, why in the name of all that's le, should he wish it *had* been

use, if it had," Rourke said, quite w, "I should not have failed in ise to a friend; and my conscience ve been at rest."

orraine could detect the uneasie cool tones; but to her they re-emselfes again and again that

night, until at last a sudden resolution came to her.

Miss Shefford had not dropped into her first sleep—for she had set up late at that over-night packing which many ladies affect—when she was aware of her bedroom door being softly opened and closed again, and a whispered question addressed to her,

"Are you asleep, Miss Shefford?"

"Lorraine, is it you? What is the matter, my dear?" inquired the old lady, a good deal startled.

"Nothing is the matter," the girl said, coming up to the side of the bed and leaning down upon it; all the workings of her face imperceptible in the darkness; "nothing is the matter, but I want to ask you something."

"But why come to me in the dark?" asked Miss Shefford, who, though she comprehended Una's nature thoroughly, understood very little yet of Lorraine's.

"Because I did not think of it until to-day, and you stayed out until so late, and then—and then," she added, glad that these words at least were no prevarication.

"Una and I have been dawdling together. Una has been talking about things, Miss Shefford; you know what I mean. The marriage is fixed. Rourke and she arranged it this evening. The twenty-first of November. Not quite seven weeks from now; it will soon be here, won't it, Miss Shefford?"

"Too soon for us, dear. For Rourke and Una not at all too soon, I suppose."

"Not at all too soon," echoed the girl, softly. "I was very glad—very glad, Miss Shefford."

"Glad! yet you have always shrunk from the subject, and said that when you should lose Una you should——"

"But I think differently now," interrupted Lorraine; "I am glad. Would not I be naturally glad for Una's sake? And, as I said, Miss Shefford, we've been talking about it; I told her I was glad then—I hope she understood me. I hope she quite understood me."

"She would, of course. But you have talked so long, dear, that you ought to be in bed, now, especially as you have a journey to take to-morrow."

"It is about that journey I want to speak to you, Miss Shefford—" the girl's voice, always so wooing and winning, was beyond measure earnest now—"I want to go from home somewhere for a little time, and I want you to make it smooth for me to go; not to let papa forbid me at the last moment, and not to let Una suspect—be surprised I mean—and insist on going with me or—or think it odd that I should go and only take Joan."

"But why should you go at all?"

The girl's soft lips crept, in the darkness, to Miss Shefford's cheek, and then the whisper that came from them sounded like truth.

"Miss Shefford, I am not well.' I haven't been well for some time now. I have a pain. I used to have this same pain—yes, just this very same pain—when I was little; and Dr. Vere once told Aunt Farrissey to send me to the sea for a week or two, and it—it would cure me. She never sent me, but I think if I could go now—just for two or three weeks—I should be quite well. I want to be quite well for Una's marriage."

"Of course, my child, or she will be miserable. But I never could have suspected this pain, you look so well; your eyes and every movement of your figure show such perfect health."

"Yes, I knew, I don't look ill, or—thin," assented Lorraine, slowly, "but I have heard doctors say one cannot judge by that."

"Well, we will talk to Una about it to-morrow," said the old lady soothingly.

"Miss Shefford—dear Miss Shefford," the girl pleaded, with a gasp, "please don't ask Una; please don't give her the opportunity of preventing it; please tell her you think it best for me to go; and that she—she must go home with papa and Mr. Lucas and Mr. Trenham. She must not think anything of it, except that I need a little change. That is almost quite natural, isn't it?"

"But it would seem more natural for her to go."

"Then I could not go at all," said Lorraine, with passionate quietness. "Una must not leave Rourke now, when he has

only been a few weeks in England, though I dare say she would not make any trouble about it, because she is so kind and loving. Oh! Miss Shefford, I should so like every thing disagreeable and dismal kept from Una just now."

"Lorraine, my dear"—the old lady had risen from her pillows, and her arms went softly out and clasped themselves about the slight, chill form which leaned beside her bed—"Lorraine, my dear, I will come. I will take you. I will require a change and ask you to come with me; now kiss me and go to bed, my child. I will arrange it all, and we will go to-morrow to the sea."

Such a truly grateful, lingering kiss it was which Lorraine gave in the darkness; and so straight from her heart came the few words of thanks.

Then groping her way, she went noiselessly from the room; knowing her real secret had not been guessed at, while, for the second time that night, the falsehood she had told had been implicitly believed, and had worked its end.

Believed indeed implicitly; for, through half the night, Miss Shefford lay musing most uncomfortably over this pain which Lorraine had borne so secretly and uncomplainingly until now; a pain which must be great indeed to force her to seek what had all her life caused her such misery, a separation from Una; yet which could not affect the brilliance of her beauty or the roundness of her form.

"Well, she is a thoughtful girl to wish to spare Una all anxiety just now," the old lady decided with herself, as she stumbled a moment on the threshold of her first sleep, "and I will do my best to aid her in this. But I shall certainly consult Dr. Vere about her when we return to Rupert's Rest."

The journey to Brighton was proposed and decided upon rapidly and easily now Miss Shefford had taken the matter into her own hands; and though it was a great disappointment to Una, she could not object to the change her old governess said she needed; nor question the wisdom of the plan which left her with Rourke and Mr. Gaveston, and took away Lorraine, who was neither the betrothed of one nor

the favorite of the other. For she knew it would not have been right for both sisters to go, and let their father return home alone with his guests.

The train for Atton left London an hour before the one for Brighton by which Miss Shefford had decided to travel, and the girls were parting in the hall, when Rourke Trenham came in and told them he had decided to go to Scotland for a day or two.

Then Lorraine knew that this separation was an unnecessary pain; and her heart felt drearily, for it was too late to change it now.

"I will soon follow you, Una," Rourke said, as he stood at the cab-door; "but Duncan will be eternally offended if I do not run down just to take a look at his Scotch den, and an aim at his birds. Good-bye! Take my heartiest love to Uncle Bartle and Vere."

"And to no one else?" asked Una, with a smile, while the tears stood thick in her eyes during this parting.

"To no one else."

Then they drove off, and he turned back and waited in the house until Miss Shefford and Lorraine should leave. He saw nothing of Lorraine through that hour; but still he dawdled there determinately (however impatiently it might have been), until at last she came alone into the room where he was. He did not see the start she gave on meeting him; he only saw how unconcernedly she offered him her hand to say good-bye.

"As soon as I heard you were not going home, Lorraine," he said, "I decided to go north. I do not intend to break my word, but still I intend to miss you as little as I can. There will be nothing in Scotland to remind me of you, and Duncan will never mention your name, so I am going."

"Good-bye, Mr. Trenham," she said, in a tone of utter indifference. "I hope you will enjoy your visit. I dare say the change will be as welcome to you as to Miss Shefford and myself. Mr. Lucas was quite right, I think. London has been very dull for the last few weeks."

"To you," he said, with haughty quietness; "and if I had returned with you to-

day, home would have been very dull too. Well—good-bye."

But though his words ceased abruptly and her hand was dropped, his eyes rested cravingly upon her face until the cab rolled away and took her from him.

Day after day, amid the excitements and amusements and the fashions of Brighton, Lorraine was haunted sadly by that look; and it was then that there glided for the first time into the girl's mind a doubt as to her future conduct. A doubt she fought with, and struggled with, and tried with all her heart and strength to stifle; but which, once raised, grew fiercer and stronger and more seducing hour by hour.

Need she have taken this decision into her own hands? Could she not have left it to Rourke to tell Una what he would, and left it to Una to act as she thought best?

That was, in simple words, the doubt which began to distress her now, and was to distress her again and again through the time to come; but it did not visit her only in that simple form. To harass and perplex, to baffle and bewilder, to tempt and try her, it took every imaginable guise. With what success it haunted and allured, her story in its course will show.

Miss Shefford and Lorraine had not been three weeks in Brighton, when a letter from Una decided them on returning home at once. A short, rather vague letter it was, announcing the death of Mrs. Trenham, of Hohve, in Rourke's absence, and expressing Una's great wish to have her sister and her old governess with her now.

"We will go at once. What about the trains, Lorraine? and—and there's all the packing to do," fretted the old lady. "We shall never be in time for the first train." But, thanks to Lorraine's deft fingers and fleet steps as she guided Joan and helped Miss Shefford, the very first train to London took them all three with it on their way home.

Una, standing on the steps at Rupert's Rest, welcomed them there as the hour was slowly striking from the great turret bell at Hohve; the muffled notes creeping across the Autumn landscape, where they had used to ring with sonorous power.

"Whose doing is that?" asked Lorraine, raising her head to listen.

"Mr. Newley's, of course; he pays the deepest respect for Mrs. Trenham's memory."

"Oh!" said Lorraine, uttering the word with the keenest contempt of which her young lips were capable. "Then Mr. Spencer need hardly trouble himself to order a muffled peal from the church. Where's Rourke?"

"Not come yet," answered Una, regretfully.

"Not come? Was not the master sent for in time?"

"He did not *come* in time," returned Una, with sadness.

"Then he was not sent for. Newley only pretended to telegraph, or sent the message to a roundabout address, or something to serve his own mean ends. How *dare* he?"

"Lorraine, dear," put in Miss Shefford, "you should not censure in ignorance."

"Was it sudden death?" asked Lorraine, with a change of voice, as she still stood looking across at the battlemented towers of Hohve.

"No; Mrs. Trenham had been failing for some time."

"Then I know that Newley has purposely kept the illness concealed from Rourke," cried the girl, the passion of anger rushing back into her eyes. "Why, he is *only* in Scotland. He could have been here any time in one day; and do you suppose he *would* not? Did not he tell us in London that he had good reason to know his return was not wanted until the two years for which he went away had fully expired? Have not they kept him away between them, and has it not been beyond a doubt for some wicked purpose of that steward's?"

"Lorraine, how keenly you despise him," said Una, looking astonished into her sister's face; "and without knowing him, too. Is it quite just?"

"Quite just," returned Lorraine, firmly.

"But, at any rate, speak kindly of the dead, dear."

"I cannot. What killed her? I know she was not poisoned by Newley, because

that would not have furthered his despicable plans."

"Hush, Lorraine, don't say such things. Mrs. Trenham has been an invalid, as one may say, for years. It was a gradual decay of nature, Dr. Thorne says."

"Dr. Thorne!" sneered Lorraine. "What had *he* to do with it? Where was Athol Vere?"

"I don't think Athol ever attended Mrs. Trenham."

"Why not? His father was always physician at Hohve; and if Rourke were ill——"

"Oh! he would call in Athol, of course," said Una, wondering why her sister had broken off in her sentence; "but I suppose Mrs. Trenham thought him too young; or Mr. Newley called in Dr. Thorne, or something."

"Yes, or *something*. When is the funeral to be, I wonder?"

"The funeral is fixed for to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Lorraine, turning her flashing eyes swiftly and incredulously to her sister's face. "To-morrow, and her son not come! To-morrow, and the master not here!"

"But he will be here by then, we hope."

"Una, how awfully, terribly forbearing you are. You take my breath away. I want to shriek out my hatred of the man who usurps his master's home, and makes his master's home wretched. But," the girl was trying hard to curb the passion which surprised and vexed her sister, "but what was I going to say? Why is the funeral so unnaturally and wickedly soon?"

"Dear, it is not too soon," returned Una, gently; "and how could it be *wickedly* soon? Mrs. Trenham died early on Sunday morning. Didn't you see it in the papers?"

"No, we never looked. Why did not we hear from you until to-day?"

"Of course I couldn't write on Sunday, because we have no post; then on Monday papa took me into Atton—I did not think we should be late, but we were delayed on his business until it was too late for post. Tuesday I was in bed almost all day with one of my worst headaches, so I could not write until yesterday; and the funeral

was always arranged for to-morrow, Friday."

"Una, I abhor that servant of Mrs. Trenham's, though, as you say, I know so little of him."

"My dear Lorraine, if Una does not think so badly of him, I do not see why you need," put in Miss Shefford, a little reprovingly.

"No; I do not see why *I* need," echoed the girl, drearily, as they all turned to enter the house.

When Mr. Gaveston came in to lunch, he told them that Rourke had arrived at Hohve; and added that he had left a message to beg him to come and see them, knowing how dull it would be at the great old death-shadowed house.

Lorraine listened in silence; but as soon as the meal was over she escaped from the house, as if its closeness stifled her. First she wandered restlessly to the stable, and stood a few minutes in hesitation beside her beautiful roan mare.

"No, not to-day, Czarina," she said, at last, with a sigh. "Una would not like me to be seen riding about the country alone to-day. No—I will walk."

So a few minutes afterwards, while Miss Shefford and Una sat talking beside the fire in their bright little sitting-room, she left the house, and took her way rapidly across the meadows to The Narrows.

CHAPTER XI.

ABRAM BARTLE was sitting in his favorite seat beside one of the windows in his parlor when Lorraine arrived at the farm. It struck her at once that he was waiting and watching for some one, and the idea grew upon her through all his unfeigned delight at seeing her. She sat beside him, one hand linked in his arm, as it had been a habit of hers to link it when, in her childhood, he had been to her a tower of strength, and the other straying daintily among the sprays of clematis which peeped upon them from their sheltered nook outside this window, which Abram liked to have open almost every day in the year; and because no bleak winds found their way through, but because, through it, he could see the bridle road from Hohve.

Sitting so, he and Lorraine talked lovingly and cheerfully of the time since they had last met; and with this old friend the girl seemed as the child again, with the old mixture of wistfulness and wilfulness. The oppression was lifted from her heart, and the grave, mischievous brightness came again to her beautiful eyes.

She had asked him to tell her of Mrs. Trenham's death, but found him so strangely unwilling to speak of it that she went back readily to what she knew he liked to hear, that part of their stay in London when they had had Rourke with them.

"Tell me exactly," he said, as if he had never asked it before, "how my boy is changed by his long travel. Tell me what he is like now, and I shall quickly enough detect the changes, Gipsy."

But it was very vainly that she tried to tell him; looking dreamily out among the reddening leaves, as she recalled the face she loved with such a brave, unselfish love.

"You don't describe anything I don't know, Gipsy," said the old man with a smile. "It seems as if you remember only just what I remember, though you saw him two weeks ago and I two years. Two years!" he repeated, thoughtfully; "yet every day I see him over there, throwing his stick high into the air, as a signal to me; or coming in with his old greeting, 'Hallo! Uncle Bart. Here I am!' I see him loitering about the house with me, his boyishness as good as a fresh sea-breeze to old Abry; who knew that the truest manliness would follow, like the same breeze filling the sails of a great vessel out at sea and bringing her proudly home. I see him walking up the garden there, the dogs all rushing out in a troop at his whistle; I hear him gravely flattering Judith out in the kitchen, and his laugh when he tells me of her sharp reception of his compliments. I see him standing at this very window in the dusk, telling me—with a rare gay forbearance; in all his disappointment—of the unhomeliness of his home under his stepmother's rule. I see him, as he tells me (sometimes in anger, sometimes in laughter) of Newley's insolent and placid arrogance—he to be kept down by a servant; *he*, the gentleman and the squire, every inch of him! I

see him," continued Abram, checking the last word suddenly, "drawing in his horse a moment to open the garden-gate, or leaping it if I am by. Everything about the management of a horse came as easily to him, Gipsy, as taking off his hat; you know that, though—everybody knows that."

"I dare say I shall see it some day," said Lorraine, brightly, in her utter ignorance. "I have heard Dr. Vere speak of Rourke's fondness for taming untameable horses, but he very seldom rode in London. He will have plenty of time and opportunity now, won't he?"

"True, true," murmured the old man softly, as he always did when a subject bordered on unpleasantness or danger. "Yes, *that* power seems given him somehow, as I believe his Maker has given him power to win love that shall compensate for the dearth of it in his home. Gipsy, to that same Maker, may be, he must account for both those powers; and—knowing how his youth has been tried, and how his manhood is likely to be tried—I often fear for my boy with a restless, miserable fear."

"Mr. Bartle, look!—look who is coming."

After all, the old man's eyes, disturbed in their watching, had not been the first to catch sight of the figure he had been recalling. Seeing it now, and the stick thrown lightly up into the air as if those two years had been but a dream, he rose slowly and turned away from the window. It seemed as if the sight of Rourke, really coming to him at last, took all courage from the eyes which had been forever seeing him while he had been hundreds of miles away.

"I'll go out and tell Mrs. Whinnipeg he's coming!" cried Lorraine, with all her old childish excitement. "He won't come in *that* way to-day."

"Dear," said the old man, falteringly, "don't run away. I would rather——"

But Lorraine was gone, and so he and his boy met alone; and Rourke—loving and keen and quizzical, as of old—noticed at once a strange, new nervousness, almost hidden pity, in his uncle's manner.

"I declare," he said, when they had sat for more than half an hour, "I have for-

gotten to pay my respects to the fair Judith. Come along, uncle."

"I won't tell him whom he'll find there," thought Abram to himself: "time enough when he finds her."

At the table of the bright farm-kitchen, stood Abram's housekeeper, buttering home-made muffins, and listening placidly while Lorraine, who knelt before the fire toasting them, entertained her with a highly exaggerated description of the Royal Family from personal observation; as she had done years and years ago when she wished to engage Judith's attention, and when Judith, in all her acrimony, had always been wont to listen under protest, with a surreptitious admiration for the childish eyes which had really gazed on Royalty in the flesh.

"Why, Gipsy," cried Bartle, laughing at the tableau. "Burning your face as heedlessly as if you were one of a real tribe."

Rourke had not spoken nor moved towards her. When she slowly rose and advanced to him, they were all at liberty to see how the fire had crimsoned her soft, dark cheeks.

During her stay in Brighton, through those long solitary thoughts which she had nursed beside the sea, Lorraine had made one firm determination. No word or look of hers should ever betray to Rourke that she even remembered that twilight talk in the old school-room at Hampton House; and if ever even an echo crept between them of such seriousness as his had been then, she could simply—so she hoped and prayed and believed—treat it as a jest.

"Mr. Bartle," she said, turning to him almost pleadingly, after they had returned to the parlor, "I think I ought not to stay to tea. Una does not know where I am."

"Now, my dear," said Abram, as tenderly as if he had kissed her with the words, "you *promised* me. Didn't we agree they would know exactly where you were, and that they couldn't grudge you to the solitary old man just for this evening?"

"But you are not solitary now."

"Oh, is that it?" he said, with a laughing glance at Rourke. "May I only have one at a time then? Are you afraid c

old Abry with this double plea. If not, do stop, my dear," he added, earnestness which she could not count for. "Let me have this one to remember—I mean to particular."

Would you rather that I went, he asked Trenham, quietly. He hurriedly shook her head with a frown at that idea. And so she stayed, with a lith brought in the tea in festive

thing I have remarked with enmity," said Rourke, as he drew his arm-chair to the table, "Judith has no lugubrious allusions to the dead nor has she yet nipped any of us, my dear?"

Rourke, dear lad," said Abram, solemnly, "there was a merry twinkle in her grey eyes, 'Judith has passed the waters of matrimony; and they were but narrow for her, and hallow too, they were troublous, her muddier.'"

With married?"

With married," repeated Abram, "no enjoyment; 'but you don't do a smile, Rourke; there was a good deal of tragedy than comedy about married life. If you'll help your some of her cakes, I'll tell you the You don't seem to me to be eating, and I can't tell unless you do."

Could think ill of Judith while she ate these cakes of hers, could they,

That's right, lad. Now where begin? When I first found him about here after Judith, I warned him. He been turned from the brickfields, and nothing better than a vagabond. He wanted her savings; but when she met him in meeting him, and wanted to him, I shut my eyes to all. She was enough to know her own mind, I; and if her own mind was bent on matrimony, my advice would never prevail. Young lovers are always per- d obstinate, eh, Rourke? and he, I rate, wasn't older than yourself, she might be on the cool side of Well, one day, when I came upon her together in the kitchen there, I asked

them both their intentions, blunt out; and Judith (it was she spoke first) said they wanted to be married at once and emigrate. And he—I don't heed his name, I forgot it as soon as I could—said yes, that was their intention; they'd saved money, and should get a good farm in the New Country. I took the liberty of asking him how much he had saved; but, bless ye, Rourke, lad, he cried as if he was a baby and I'd pricked him, and said it was in the bank, and he couldn't get it out till they were married, and a lot more lies. But could a saint have helped laughing to hear what I heard as I left them in their affection? 'Judith,' says he, 'I know you might have a richer chap and a handsomer, but a lovin'er, oh, never, Judith, my dear?' Then in a still lower and sweeter tone, 'Don't let him keep your bit of money back; though I don't want it, our—our children will, Judith.' And then he fell to crying again. Well, Judith, poor woman, got her money out of the bank, and put it in a box, and went off to be married; taking only one bit of my advice, that was literally keeping the money in her own hands. This she had courage to stick to while they bought what they wanted in Plymouth, and put their goods on board ship. The vessel was to sail the next day, the scamp told her, and he'd run round by the docks as they went back to their lodging, just to see that all was right for them. As they went along he got mor- and more affectionate, and presently induced her to pass him the little box to carry, as she looked a bit tired. Well—Gipsy, take the warning, my dear, before you choose your own husband—he took the box, turned down a side-street, and from that moment Judith has never seen or heard of him. Of course an experienced woman of the world would have gone down to the ship (which sailed that day, as you've guessed) and stopped him; but Judith, poor lass, had no notion what to do except cry and sob after her slippery husband."

"And never caught him, uncle?"

"Never caught him, Rourke, lad; all the better for her, I say. One night I was sitting here by myself, the maids gone to bed, when in comes Judith without a sole to her boot; as thin and as worn and as

white as an apparition and—a great deal milder.”

“And you took her back, Mr. Bartle?”

“Took her back, my dear! Why, even her husband would have taken her back if he’d seen her then; and she hadn’t given her best years in *his* service as she had in mine; and she’d walked, poor lass, from Plymouth all the seventy miles, and eaten only what had been given her. Why, yes, my dear, I took her back; and she’s been with me ever since, and never mentioned her bridegroom.”

“*I thought* there was a wonderful change,” said Rourke, musing. “She made the tea quite a kind of festival, and *yet* never moaned that you were forgetting the poor dear mistress.”

“Yes, yes; matrimony makes great changes generally, said Abram, with a sly glance into the young man’s eyes. “I always expect it and make allowance for it. Gipsy will find even her own sister change presently. When is it to be?”

A hot flame rushed to the very roots of Trenham’s hair, while Lorraine answered.

“The twenty-first of November was the day fixed upon, but——”

“I see, dear. The sad event at Hohve will delay it. Of course, of course. Poor Rourke!”

“Don’t pity me, uncle,” he said, a little hotly, as he rose to poke the already cheerful fire. “I mean a little waiting will not be hard for either of us.”

“Why should it be?” said the old man, with unwonted seriousness. “Both are young, and true, and tried. What difference will a little waiting make? Gipsy, what is it, dear? You are pale as one of my clematis flowers. Shut down the window, Rourke, dear lad. She feels the chill air creeping in.”

“Fancy *my* face ever looking white, Mr Bartle,” said the girl, turning to him with the clinging nervousness of a child; “my brown face.”

“Little brown faces can grow pale,” said Abram, touching with ineffable tenderness the soft, rounded cheeks. “Brown, did you say? Yes, I suppose so—certainly not white; but so beautiful, Gipsy; so beyond measure beautiful,”

For the first time, under the old man’s simply fatherly caress, Lorraine’s heart beat timidly and swiftly; for as he spoke Rourke had stood near her, and in his face was a love which it broke her heart to see; a longing, too, to utter just such words as he heard from other lips, or to take in *his* hands, too, the girlish face now clothed so richly in its blushes. But when the old farmer very softly laid his lips upon it, as he still held it in his hands, Rourke turned away instantly, his shoulders heaving in the curbed passion of his love and jealousy and despair.

“Do you remember, Gipsy,” said Abram, watching her proudly, as she moved back into her place at the head of the table, “the morning after you ran away from London, when you came here and burned my bacon? Ah! Rourke, you little guess what a discussion we had about you that morning. What do you think of her telling old Abry that you were the very identical person she intended to marry?”

Poor Abram! so innocently was the old joke recalled. Had he not known for years that these two were to be brother and sister? And would not the girl be sure to laugh heartily over the childish criticism!

And she did laugh, her pretty, fresh laugh, while she slowly poured the rich cream into the waiting cups.

And Trenham came and took his from her hand with his old ease, though under the brown moustache his lips were tight and drawn with pride and pain,

“Ah! we’ve had some happy times together, you and I, haven’t we, Gipsy?” continued the old man, almost as if he shrank from addressing anyone but her just then. “Do you remember coming on the fifth of November that year, and making a bonfire between the wood-pile and the wind, and our having the engines out from Atton, and your running off alone to the laborers’ cottages and making them carry out their furniture. What a frightened and singed atom you looked when I captured you at last!”

“And smutty, I know, Mr. Bartle.”

“Ye—es, rather smutty and smoky, I think; but I remember how merrily we supped together afterwards, when my glo

rious wood-stack was a thing of the past. Rourke, another slice of that tongue, please. This is the pleasantest meal I've had for years. Of course, you will dine after it: but for me, I think it will be meal enough for to-morrow."

"I don't dine after this," replied Rourke, promptly. "I told Mrs. Sheriff she would escape the trouble of ordering a dinner at Hohve to-night."

"Then, where will Mr. Newley dine?" asked Lorraine, raising her eyebrows with a quizzical smile.

"Where she likes; if she chooses to have dinner served for him, let her."

"I hope she won't," said the girl, promptly. "I hope he will hunger and thirst all night."

"Do you?" asked Rourke, astonished. "I shouldn't have thought you would. Why is it?"

"Because I detest him so: don't you, Mr. Bartle? And I hope that some day a letter, which he dreadfully wants, shall be entrusted into just such false, selfish hands as his own."

"Do you?"

"Rourke, dear lad," said Abram, astonished too, "you seem very patient about him to-night—even now when he has injured you most."

"Because he and I will have so little more to do with each other," the young man answered. "He knows that his reign at Hohve is over now."

"How does he know it?"

Rourke started a little at the question.

"Of course he knows it. He must know it. He knows he has always been my enemy, and that I should naturally——"

"Turn him out at once," concluded Lorraine.

"Not turn him out, but dispense with his services. He is welcome to stay in his old quarters until he has obtained others. But I fancy he has done so, because he seems so content to think it is all over between us."

"He must have saved plenty of money," put in Abram; "so he has no need to stay—except over the funeral."

"Of course, over the funeral," said Rourke, the gravity which had been upon

him all the evening deepening a little. "Uncle Bart, I shall send a carriage for you early in the morning. Your first coming to my house shall not be on foot."

"Rourke, dear lad, don't send for me," said Abram almost entreatingly; "I am not coming—not coming."

"Not coming, Uncle Bart! You surely will not refuse me *that*."

"It's harder work for me than you, Rourke, so don't ask me, lad. I cannot follow her in sorrow or affection, so I'd rather not follow her at all. It's an old man's whim, but none cling so obstinately to their whims, when they take them, as old men."

"I will not ask you if it will be a trouble for you to come; but you will not fail in your promise to come to Hohve very often afterwards. Our old project can be splendidly carried out, Uncle Bart; for Winterfield is vacant, and I have the power now in my own hands of spending what I like upon it. And Hohve, too, shall be wonderfully improved by you and me."

"In preparation for your marriage?" questioned Bartle, rather hurriedly. "Well, well, it will grandly repay all money and all labor bestowed upon it; but it wants but little, dear lad, and—and the marriage is not yet."

Then Lorraine, wishing she had not met Rourke's restless eyes just then, began talking of other things, and presently rose to say good night. As she took her jacket from a side table, and, with a smile, gave it to Abram to hold for her as she had been used to do when she had been a little child, and he had had to stoop very much to bring his hands on a level with hers, Rourke walked leisurely out into the hall and took down his overcoat.

"Joan is to come for me," she said, nervously, when she saw him do this: "she most probably is here."

"And Brent was to come for me," said Rourke, coolly, as he re-entered the room. "He shall drive Joan back instead of me; and I will take you instead of Brent."

"I would rather go with Joan," said Lorraine, putting on her hat, while her eyes were fixed defiantly, though rather shrinkingly, upon Rourke.

"Why, my dear," exclaimed Abram; "why should not you two go together? What more natural when, of course, Rourke is going to Rupert's Rest, and he'll take good care of you. I'll see about Joan when she comes, and despatch her with Brent. I shall like to see them together; an honest and industrious lad and lass; ay, ay, I'll be glad to see Andrew Brent after his two years' absence."

"Have you seen much of his little sweetheart, uncle?" asked Rourke, as he buttoned his coat.

"No, no. Can you tell me, lad, what blinded him to go and tie himself to her?"

"Love, I suppose," laughed the young man, as if all love were but a jest to him. "What else?"

"I think I—I will wait for Joan," said Lorraine, shrinking nearer to the old farmer. "If we go separately, you won't think it so lonely afterwards, Mr. Bartle?"

"My dear, I won't think it lonely," he answered, looking at her with unfeigned surprise; "why should you not go together, you two?"

And Lorraine, feeling how impossible it was to explain this, quietly bid him good night, and turned away with Rourke.

Through the meadows in the quiet dusk of the November night they two walked together in a strange silence which neither tried to break; a silence which held a nameless pain for both, yet a nameless dreary pleasure too. Hardly one word had passed between them when they stopped at the gate of Rupert's Rest. Then Lorraine, surprised to see that her companion hesitated, asked him if he were not coming in to see Una.

"Presently," Trenham said; "I have one or two things to see about first. I will come presently."

Then they went on their separate ways, and the silence of each, even then, was not greater than it had been while they walked together.

CHAPTER XII.

ON his return to Hohve, Rourke strolled to The Den, which Brent had prepared for him, and, lighting a cigar, sat there in a reverie, while the mute glow of the wax-

lights shone out and broke, for a little distance, the gloom upon the park; and while the faint western grey hung calm and serene and beautiful beyond the battlements of the home which now he called his own.

A little of his past life was Rourke reliving as he sat there alone; thinking as kindly as he might of his father's wife, and stifling fancies, that rose like memories, of his own mother; thinking how good it was for him to have won Una's love to warm and gladden his beautiful home; and stifling the memory that rose of Lorraine, who—all unheeded by him—must have been beautiful and winning even on that day seven years ago when she had said he was the person she intended to marry, and when the choice had lain in his hands.

Bravely, even in his idle listlessness, he tried not to dream how it might be if those seven years could be lived over again; tried to forget those two haunting faces, and recall only those of his stepmother and affianced wife. And as the grey light faded above the high dim outlines of the house where death had been so lately, the unspoken-of and unseen victory had been won.

A step up the narrow paved steps, and Horton Newley came into The Den. Rourke turning slowly on his lounging-chair, greeted him with quiet politeness.

No words had the steward heard from him since his return but what had been quiet and even considerate. Would he not soon be gone, Rourke thought, and perhaps he, poor fellow, might be fond of Hohve with just a little of Rourke's own deep fondness for the grand old place.

"Brent told me you were here. I wish to speak to you of one or two things regarding to-morrow."

"I thought you had made all your arrangements before I arrived," said Rourke, removing his cigar for one moment, and then turning his eyes again to the darkening window.

"But since then," returned Newley, leaning against the table opposite Rourke's chair (he could not make up his mind to stand with any degree of respect, yet still he could not see his way to taking the other easy chair), "before you went out to-day you added the name of Abram Bartle of

The Narrowway to the list of county guests, of personal friends of Mrs. Trenham's. Was this an oversight?"

"No."

"You mistook the list to which you intended to affix his name, of course," persisted the steward, with an air of confidence, uneasy, though, in spite of his efforts. "You meant it to be among the tenants who are expected to follow out of respect, not among the invited, honored guests."

"Mr. Bartle was invited as an honored guest—a *particularly* honored guest," returned Rourke, with lazy good-humor.

"Do you forget that he has not visited here?"

"I do not forget that my mother and his wife were sisters."

"But not the late Mrs. Trenham."

"No," said Rourke, with haughty quietude; "but we will now pay her the same respect as if she *had* been sister to my Uncle Bartle's wife."

"If this is persisted in," said Newley, curbing his passion with a supreme effort, "it will cause a great deal of unpleasantness to-morrow. It is not to be expected that the county gentlemen will relish having Mr. Bartle with them as a fellow-guest, 'an honored guest,' as it amuses you to designate him."

"Mr. Bartle," said Trenham, smothering his desire to retort on Mr. Newley's probable chances of an appreciative reception, "Mr. Bartle will from this day always be an honored guest at Hohve."

Newley's glance was hard to decipher; but Rourke felt hotly conscious of a little of its arrogant assurance. And still he uttered no word of either wrath or scorn.

"Then I am to understand that you really intend to put this farmer among Mrs. Trenham's chief mourners?"

"I had hoped to do so," Rourke answered, leisurely; "but I have been disappointed. Mr. Bartle refuses to be one among them; he declines to attend the funeral, or to breakfast here."

"A very prudential decision," said Newley, rising from his leaning position, and attempting to hide his relief.

"Newley," said Trenham, turning his handsome face fully into the candle-light,

and addressing the steward in a tone so full of quiet, proud superiority, that it was little wonder the man resented it in that dangerous silence of his. "Newley," you have always known that after Mrs. Trenham's death your services at Hohve would be no longer required; your presence hardly very welcome, considering what you have made it. But we will not speak of that to-day; there is little that we need ever speak of, you and I. I only wish to remind you that you are no longer my steward. But until you enter into another engagement, or make other arrangements, you are welcome to stay."

"You are kind, indeed," Horton Newley said, with slow, clear utterance. "I will stay—at least, over to-morrow."

"As long as you like," returned Rourke, negligently, though for the second time he caught himself wondering uncomfortably why the words sounded as if a threat lurked in them. "Good night."

Rourke Trenham's valet, meeting Mr. Newley on his way from The Den, noticed how at variance was the peculiar smile which stirred his lips with the strict air of mourning he had worn all day, and pondered on it until he stood in his master's presence; and Rourke, still in his musing attitude, asked pleasantly, "That you, Brent?"

"I have driven home Miss Gaveston's maid, sir!"

"Of course you have. A nice prim little rosy-cheeked Puritan, isn't she?"

"Is a Puritan a lady's maid, sir?"

"Yes, that kind of lady's maid; not one like Rhoda. By the way, you have seen her, I suppose, since you came home?"

"Yes sir." But Rourke noticed that it was rather a heavy yes.

"You surely need not wait for your little wife much longer, Brent," he said, kindly. "On our return"—Rourke did not specify his wedding tour, but the valet understood—"you will feel your time come, and remember I intend you to have the Winterfield Lodge. I would propose the wedding first, and ask Miss Gaveston to take Rhoda as her maid; but from all I hear, I fancy she has not cared to prepare herself for anything of that kind, and would be no use

or comfort. Now, if she were such a girl as the one you have just been driving home—I knew her in London—it would be different."

A cloud came over Andrew's quick bright eyes. Was the master meaning something particular that he spoke in this straightforward and rather unkind way of pretty little Rhoda? And he himself was foolish, and couldn't see his way clear to stand up for her like a lover. It was a kind of refuge for him to be able to thank his master so openly for the promise of the Lodge, while he quietly placed wine and glasses on the table. Then, almost for the first time within his memory, it was a relief to him to leave The Den, where his master sat. Between the gloom of the park without, and the light of the room within, Rourke went on building his plans for the life that lay before him—untrammelled now, because his father's home was his at last—and stifling those dreams which rose to harass and to weaken him in his loneliness.

Another footstep, and Athol Vere came into the quiet room. Rourke started from his seat to greet him gladly.

"I saw the light as I passed through the park," he said, "and I could not resist looking in."

"I am glad you could not."

"But I cannot wait, Trenham. I am on my way to the Winterfield Lodge. I left the poor old woman there so ill this morning, that I determined to look in before I considered my day's work over. I did not like her restlessness, and I shall be more comfortable if I find her better."

"Or leave her better," said Rourke, as he poured his friend a glass of wine. "I will come with you, Vere. I'm rather restless myself—like poor old Miriam—and you will do me good as well as her."

"But they will be expecting you at Rupert's Rest."

"Yes; I will go on from the Lodge—and take you too."

"I object to go," said Athol, laughing.

"Three are not company, they say; and Mr. Gaveston, I know, is at the Priory to-night."

"But Miss Shefford and Lorraine have returned."

"Have they? Then I will come."

Athol made no effort to hide the pleasure this news had given him; and Rourke jealously wondered how it would be if he might thus openly show his delight at the thought of meeting this girl, whom he felt that he loved with more depth and strength and passion than did the old friend beside him.

"They do not expect me here," said Vere, as they approached the Lodge. "I did not say I should come, because I might not have been able to do so. Ah!" he exclaimed, turning hastily aside, as he saw the door ajar and a beam of ruddy firelight streaming out upon the little garden path; "some friend of Miriam's is with her. I will not go in, after all. Come, Trenham."

"It's no friend of Miriam's," said Rourke wondering at Athol's sudden and, as it seemed, rather uncharitable hesitation. "It is a man's voice I hear. Brent, of course, poor fellow. Come along, Vere."

And Trenham as he spoke, rapped, and entered the pretty little firelit room. Then the grave quizzing of his eyes and the pleasant words that had been upon his lips for the young lovers gave place slowly to the quiet sceptical disdain which came at times so terribly natural to him.

Together, in the warmest, fullest rays of the bright fire, stood Rhoda and Horton Newley. The steward had evidently taken his leave once, and, from the open door, turned back to enforce some particular words. He had one hand upon that shoulder of the girl which was further from him, and her pretty doll-face was raised to his with a whole sad, simple story written there.

"Newley," remarked Trenham, "I did not know that you were related to my valet's little mistress, or connected with her in any way. I have a fancy that he, too, is ignorant of the fact."

It would be impossible to describe the expression of suppressed rage and insolence which yet never ruffled Newley's calm bearing, and his well-governed tones.

"Your valet's ignorance as you *must* be aware, is a matter of no moment at all to me."

"As long as it is ignorance," said Rourke.

"Mary, don't forget my instructions," said the steward turning from the door, which he had reached, and speaking with his mind apparently so wrapped up in business that he could not remember the name of the girl he addressed; "keep the blinds down through the whole day, and do not leave the house yourself unless you have mourning ready. Good day."

Dr. Vere, on his way to the inner room, stopped to watch Rourke's face as the lying and impertinent excuse was uttered; but, to his surprise, Rourke took it as quietly as he had taken the man's other remark and lightly answered Athol's questioning gaze.

"He will be gone so soon that it is not worth while worrying about it, Vere. His away is over now, you know."

"Doctor, is it the master in there?—is it the master?" whispered Miriam, nervously, as the young physician entered her room. "I—I knew he would find *him* here at last. I knew it, and I've lain imaginin' to myself the drefful anger in his eyes—beautiful eyes he has, but, oh! so angered when that man comes creepin' thwart his ways. I'm always frightened; always. Doctor, doctor"—the sharp tones were a whisper now. "I wish 'twould all be over for me before—"

"Before what?" asked Athol, with his pleasant smile.

"Before it's over for one of them."

"Nonsense, Miriam," laughed Athol, gently, "they are both young men, hale and strong."

But, seeing how she shivered on her pillow, he turned the subject aside; and sitting by her, cheered and soothed her as the high and wise Physician, who standeth at the right hand of the poor, has put it into the hearts of some of his followers to do.

And in the little firelit kitchen Rourke Trenham talked with Rhoda as he had never talked with any girl before; urged not only by his knowledge of the man who had just left her, but for the sake, too, of the true man who was to be her husband. But neither his words of encouragement nor those of warning and reproach went deeper into the girl's shallow mind than other words had done before—no; not for all her fluttering admiration for Andrew's mas-

ter, before whom she stood blushing and curtsying, and waiting eagerly for such a gay compliment as she had once or twice received from him before.

When Athol came from Miriam's room, Rourke turned to join him with a thorough consciousness of failure; and they walked at once to Rupert's Rest, speaking no more of Newley, or of any other wearing and provoking topic, because Athol knew what a harassing and tiring day this had been for Trenham, and how he had been travelling through many hours before.

"Is Miriam dying, Vere?"

"No; she may have years to live, but she is very infirm, and suffers a great deal, poor thing."

That was all they said relating to the visit to The Lodge.

That night when they had left Rupert's Rest, still together, the young physician, whose one love-dream made all his work and his privations light to him, felt that that evening had lasted through untold days, for he had learned Rourke's secret. Perhaps it was because Rourke (sitting with Lorraine in the room where he had first seen her, and knowing how the secret of his love was in her keeping now for good or evil, and that from her, at least, he had nothing either to hide or to hope from caution or concealment) was rash and unguarded as it was in his nature to be. And perhaps it was because Athol's own love-story, being simple as yea, yea, and nay, nay, left his eyes clear to read all things that had to do with her he loved. However it might have been, Athol read Rourke's secret that night; and read it with a fearful sinking of his heart.

"Does she know?" he murmured to himself again and again, as he walked on to the cottage, after leaving Trenham in the great gloomy park of Hohve; "does she know? I cannot read her heart as I can read his, though it has been my deepest study for twelve years. Not yet, at least, not yet. It could not be," his heart cried out, in the solitary pain it bore unwittingly; "yet—yet he must suffer presently if it is *not* so, as I must suffer if it *is*; and how much better it would be for her—my child, my most precious child; always most

precious from the first; always to be most precious—whatever comes.”

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. TRENHAM'S coffin had been laid, with all solemn pomp and dignity, in the great family vault under the old church in the park; where the Trenhams had been buried from time immemorial, and where there was room yet for many and many a Trenham to come. The solemn, stately breakfast was over. In their own premises the black-clad servants moved about with a noiseless decorum, while yet the ready reproach, or jest, or complaint rose as naturally to their lips as at other times, but was restrained in deference to—if not in reverence for—the general appearance of grief throughout the house. In the long dining-room, where the late mistress had sat each night to read the Holy Word to her stepson and her servants, her mourners were seating themselves now in their sable garments; with as noiseless a decorum as was observable among the servants, yet perhaps with the same inclination, through all, to let the natural reproach, or jest, or compliment have its way.

“Have the goodness to tell Mr. Trenham that we wait for him.”

The guests had all seated themselves in attitudes more or less expectant, and Mr. Marshall (of the firm of Marshall & Sullivan, solicitors of high and wide repute) raised his eyes from the sealed packet in his hand, to give this order to the grave old butler who lingered at his bidding.

“I will go,” said Dr. Vere, rising quietly. “I know where I left Mr. Trenham five minutes ago.”

“The will!” exclaimed Rourke, when his friend overtook him sauntering towards The Den, his black coat discarded for a loose grey one, while, but for that, he wore his deep mourning. “I declare I had forgotten all about it. What is the use of it except to the legatees? Let Newley go in, he is sure to have been remembered.”

“Newley is there. He was among the first to go in—trust him,” said Vere, with unusual bitterness. “But of course you must

come, Trenham. Mr. Marshall will not read the will until you do.”

“Why? What has my stepmother's will to do with me? She would not even care to leave me a ring out of her paraphernalia, and I know well enough what I inherit. Go without me, Vere. I'm sick of all to-day's form and ceremony.”

“No; everyone expects you to come, Rourke. Now change your coat again. Here, Brent has brought it.”

“What a bore you are, Brent!” said his master, carelessly, as he threw the grey jacket on one of the hall tables. “Leave it there; I shall don it again when the comedy is over.”

Then the two friends went in and took their seats among the crowd, and Mr. Marshall adjusted his eyeglasses, and broke the seals of his late client's will.

It looked an unusually short one. The lawyer must have seen that it would not take him long to read, yet he made as elaborate a pause as if he knew that, when he once began, the task would occupy him for hours. He glanced round on his audience with a nervous movement of his head, as if shaking his slight gold eyeglasses into their place on his nose; and he used his snowy handkerchief as demonstratively as if he were an expectant legatee. So Rourke thought, looking on from his low seat opposite, leaning forward with his elbows on the arms of the chair.

“Mr. Trenham.” This was a curious beginning of a will; could Mr. Marshall really be reading from the parchment in his hand, or only negligently keeping his eyes upon it as he spoke? “Mr. Trenham, I was abroad when our Mr. Sullivan came down here, at the summons of your late respected father's widow, to draw up her will; bringing, at her request, his own clerks as witnesses. Had not my partner been confined to his room now with a serious quinsy, I should not have come here to-day to perform this most—this task. I hope you thoroughly understand this, Mr. Trenham? Excuse my prefacing my reading with these words, gentlemen; but neither they nor it need detain you long.”

Mr. Newley, quietly seated with his chin upon his hand, in a rather deferential and

vorite attitude of his, felt for a moment that the apology was addressed to him; but it would not do for him to answer, for he knew, and he was a good deal reassured when the lawyer's keen eyes went from his face back to the document open on the table.

For seven minutes the lawyer read on uninterupted; the one fact of a great injustice, through the technical terms and legal implications. To himself, Rourke was repeating a few of the unnecessary and superfluous words with which the deed was clothed, while the great truth surged upon him like a wild tempestuous sea which could not reach him—yet.

Among the other listeners there was a tense and suspensive silence; and the most were cowardly, and fixed upon the floor; avoiding, above all, Rourke's face; avoiding even Newley's face. And when Mr. Marshall raised his head, though not his eyes, and fustily pushed his glasses, there was no guest but who seemed to quit the room, and talk of no matter over quietly.

"Trenham, I hope with all my heart such unpleasant task as this will fall to my share again."

He had advanced to the table, and was half sitting on it, looking down at the parchment. It signified little to him that the room was emptying fast. He waited for that.

"Tell me how it is, in your own words—words of straightforward common sense. My head is half bewildered, I think, by the meaningless phrases you have been using us—*meaningless*, aren't they?" "Naturally, Mr. Trenham," said the lawyer, "in an endeavor to speak jestingly. The whole thing is far from meaningful."

"Can you tell me—what is it? That Mr. Trenham's property has all been left by his father?"

"Horton Newley, yes," rejoined Mr. Marshall, hurriedly; "a glaring injustice, unfortunately, correct, and legal beyond dispute."

"How can a deed be legal?" Athol, was she? "For Athol Vere was standing be-

side him now, pale as he was, but without the restless fire in his eyes.

"Dear fellow, I never was her physician. She had Thorne at first, then they sent to London."

"She was sane and sound of mind beyond all doubt, Dr. Vere," said Mr. Marshall, gravely; "sane—however unjust—when she left Hohve to Horton Newley."

"But it is only for his life, Rourke; remember that," put in Athol, eagerly, as he watched the pallor of Rourke's face and the unnatural brilliance of his eyes; "only for his life, then it all reverts to you. He can have no heirs of his own. It all goes back to its rightful owner then."

"Then!" echoed Rourke, with a swift, short laugh. "Yes, then. And—and what else did you read, Marshall?"

"Ay, sure enough," struck in old Digby Surle, joining the group. "What did the woman will to her husband's son? Tell us again; though for that matter I think it was all plain enough as you read it."

"Yes; tell us again," repeated Rourke, looking steadily, though still half bewildered, into old Digby's face. "What crumbs fall to my share?"

"Mr. Trenham," explained the lawyer, turning with relief to address Mr. Surle, instead of the young man at the table near him, "Mr. Trenham inherits the estate of Winterfield, with an income of five hundred a year."

"And who—*who*," repeated Rourke, the bewilderment seeming to grow upon him in his intense suppressed excitement, "who inherits Hohve, and my father's property?"

"Rourke, dear fellow," whispered Athol, earnestly. "Come out with me a little. Don't talk any more of that thief."

Rourke turned his white passionate face, and looked at his friend with another laugh. "Is that you, Athol? Are *you* so stirred and moved by this? Wait a little. It will all seem quite natural by-and-by. I might have been prepared for it, if I had looked back upon the rest of my life and judged by that. Why did I not! Why did not you advise me? Where is he?"

Rourke's voice grew fiercer and quicker. "Where is my father's successor? Let me congratulate him on his devilry."

"Rourke, dear fellow, come away. I want to speak to you."

But Rourke, passing his hand across his forehead, his eyes flaming under their drawn brows, looked round the room; only turning his head to do so, while he maintained his half-sitting posture.

"Come away, do you say? Why should I come away? I have not heard all yet: at least, I have not understood it all. I am not quick at these things. I have never heard a will read before; and—it sounds insane to me."

"I think you understand it, Mr. Trenham."

"Do I? Then it *is* insane—or I am. That's likely enough too. What reason on earth is there for my escaping the insanity which has been lurking in our family for generations? I know it has. I have heard it often said. But I never guessed until now that it could touch an alien among us, as my father's wife was. It must be infectious as well as hereditary. Ha, ha! I would have Newley look out."

"There is no insanity in your family," said Mr. Marshall, solemnly, in his great distress.

"No insanity!" laughed Rourke, with again the quick motion of his hand across his forehead; "so Mr. Bartle says. He is my uncle, and his wife was insane, and his home and his life miserable. Yet he says, 'No, there was no insanity, though there might be sin.' What is the difference? You may call it sin; I may choose to call it insanity. It's all the same thing. Ah!" —Newley, with a forced air of unconsciousness, was entering the room again just then, but stopped at Rourke's exclamation, actually afraid, as it seemed—"ah! you scoundrel, you black-hearted, grovelling scoundrel!"

"Rourke," pleaded Athol, linking his arms in Trenham's, "do not lower yourself, dear fellow, for such as he."

But Rourke shook his friend away; and, still without deigning to stand up, in his passion, looked at the steward with a burning light in his beautiful dark blue eyes.

"You villain; you do well to cower there, you dastardly thief! But would I

touch you, do you think? If I wanted you out of my path, I would set my dogs upon you, or my keepers. Would I touch such a viper, think you? I would shake hands with every murderer in England first. What is that crime to yours? A life of slow and poisonous deceit—of daily, hourly theft—a system of accursed lying. Marshall, I shall dispute that will to the last penny I possess. That won't be long, eh! No matter, I will spend all; and then, if the matter is not ended, I will end it myself in another way."

"Rourke," whispered Athol again, still more earnestly, in his fast-growing fear, "think of Una. Whatever he has won, he has not won Una."

"There will be a deadly feud between us," continued Trenham, as if hardly comprehending Vere's words, but looking straight and almost fiercely at him, as he spoke in hot and rapid tones; "a deadly feud between me and the saintly devil there."

"And think," said Athol then, with a great effort, "how this rage of yours would astonish and hurt Lorraine."

A moment's silence, during which Athol bravely met the glance of slowly-dawning gentleness.

"Come then."

The rich tones were almost quiet now, and Rourke, rising slowly, offered his hand to the old lawyer, who had known him all his life.

"Let me see you in private for a few minutes, Mr. Trenham. I wish to speak to you about this."

And Athol was glad in his heart, knowing the lawyer's advice would be sound and wise, and might prevent Trenham's vainly contesting his stepmother's will.

"All right, I will not be a moment," said Rourke, coolly, as he walked out into the hall.

"I dressed for the comedy, and now it is over, you see," he said in a peculiar tone, as he donned again the loose grey coat.

Athol looked after the handsome, easy figure, and a smothered sigh escaped his lips.

Up and down in the hall walked Athol while the consultation went on. Once Mr.

Gaveston joined him, speaking quietly and considerably of Rourke; once Mr. Surle, snapping out a remark on the general idiocy of women; once Mr. Spencer, to gently wish that Mr. Trenham would exhibit a more Christian spirit of humility and patience under what, he must own, was a severe and trying ordeal for him; once Sir Peter Vaughan, to wonder what the deuce Miss Gaveston would say to this; and other guests, all expressing the same surprise and dissatisfaction at the substance of Mrs. Trenham's will. Heartily depressed had Athol become by it all, when at last Rourke made his appearance.

They left the house together, passing slowly down the shallow flight of steps; and Athol noticed how lingeringly Rourke laid his hot hand on the old cannon as he passed it.

"There!" he said, presently, turning to glance at the high castellated towers; "this is the last time. I will not enter it again until—unless—Vere," he said, with a change of tone; "Marshall wishes me not to dispute the will."

"And you will not?"

"Ah, you look as anxious over the request as he did. What cowards you all are!"

"He sees there is not the smallest chance of a decision in your favor, as your step-mother was thoroughly *compos mentis* to the last; and you know that the power of willing the estate was left in her hands."

"That I doubt," said Rourke. "It seems to me *now* too degrading a thing for my father even to have contemplated, not to speak of calmly carrying it out. Now that I see it in this disgraceful light, I mean; for, by Heaven, I never thought of it before."

"Then Mr. Marshall is going to examine your father's will again?"

"No, I shall do it myself; I am going at once—to-night. After that, I have promised to be guided by his advice; a cowardly promise I call it."

"A brave one, I call it," said Athol, gently.

"Vere, was such a will as this ever heard of before, do you think?"

"Yes, I think so. Injustice is as old as the earth."

"Is it? What a dreadful feud there must be between us now!"

"Shall we go straight to Rupert's Rest?" asked Athol, turning aside the other subject, and trying not to show how he shrank from what he proposed; "or to The Narrowway on our way?"

"Ah! yes," said Rourke. "Let us go there first. But why do you come, Vere?" You have a hundred other ways to go. Don't let me, in my selfishness, take you from your duties."

"I have no duties to-day," said Athol, still making an effort to speak lightly; "I gave myself this whole day."

"For the comedy? Then let us go to The Narrowway now; it is always pleasant there; there is no deception and dishonor there. We will go to Rupert's Rest as soon as ever we have seen Mr. Bartle. I want to release Una from her engagement; she never dreamed she was promising to marry a pauper."

"No!" said Athol, gravely; "she dreamed she was promising to marry *you*, Trenham; and she will not, I fancy, care to wake from that dream."

The color rose slowly and darkly in Rourke's face.

"Do you think so?" he asked, and Athol listened in vain for a note of relief or gladness. "If so, we shall be married on the day first fixed. There shall be no delay out of respect for Mrs. Trenham's memory. Delay for *her*," he repeated, with his quick, sarcastic laugh. "If Una wishes a delay, she will mean for ever."

"Una will see a good side to all this," said Athol, kindly, and with a deep-lying motive; "she always does."

"Yes, always."

But the assent might have been spoken of old Miriam, for all the rapture it contained.

"Even Lorraine will see a good side, I fancy."

"Doubtless; and to-morrow will write a letter of congratulation to Newley."

Thé few words were uttered with such a nervous irritability, and Rourke's gesture was one of such unutterable pain, that Athol could easily read the hopeless meaning of both, as he had read the real secret

the night before. And in his heart, at that moment, he could even wish that Lorraine should love this friend of his; for Athol was one of those (Ah! thank Heaven that their numbers never diminish in the world as it grows old) who would choose rather the happiness of those they love than of themselves.

"Surely she *will* love him, if she does not now," he murmured to himself; "and then she cannot neglect his happiness. Why should she destroy both his and her own to spare her sister's? Why forfeit two to ensure one? It would be cruel; and yet—and yet. My God, I would leave it all to Thee."

The young men had no need to go down to the farm, for, at one of the gates between The Narroway meadows and the turnpike-road, they came upon Abram himself.

"I must leave you for a few minutes," said Athol, noticing the unusual absence of any pleasant anticipation in the old man's face; "I must just run across to The Cottage; will you meet me?"

Yes," said Rourke, quietly; and in another minute he had, in the same tone, told his uncle the substance of Mrs. Trenham's will; while the old man kept his face turned away, shrinking, for the first time perhaps, from meeting Rourke Trenham's eyes.

"Tell me what you think of it all; say something, Uncle Bart, or my own miserable words will rush beyond me again."

"Rourke, dear lad," the old man answered, with slow, anxious tenderness, "I've guessed—for years. I've guessed how this *might* be."

"Guessed! has everyone guessed except myself? Have I been blind—or mad?"

"Neither. No one has guessed it but myself perhaps. I—I couldn't help it. As I was always thinking of you, I suppose I thought everything natural and unnatural. Never mind, dear lad. Try not to mind. It will all come right by-and-by. What do a few thousands signify—either way?"

"It is not that," said Rourke, as the two walked slowly up and down the meadow path; "I thought *you* would see the depth of the wrong that has been done me, uncle.

I fancy it might be bearable to lose one's home, and one's income, and one's position—even one's self-respect with the loss of all old habits and surroundings and ambitions—if one lost them to a brother, or a friend, or even to a gentleman like oneself. But to give them up to a slave who has all his life been a slave and toady for this one treacherous end. To give them up to *him*, a man I would have scorned even to speak to if he had not been my—a servant in my house. Great heavens! when shall I bear to think of it without this burning in my veins?"

"Winterfield is a fine farm, Rourke," said the farmer, nervously, "a fine farm; and the old house is mellow and convenient; I shall be coming to Winterfield for ever. And don't you see, dear lad, that you may be reinstated at Hohve any day. It isn't kind to be counting on the chance of death, but look how strong you are, and Newley was always slight-built, and doesn't take enough exercise to keep him healthy through many years. Then it will all come back to you, Rourke, and you'll forget this fleeting deed of injustice."

"Is my life to be longer than his, then?" asked Rourke.

"Why not?" exclaimed Bartle, hotly. "Are you such a waspish fellow as he? The Trenhams have always been long-lived, and you—you—. There never has been a stronger or a better-looking Trenham than yourself, dear lad," continued Abram with sudden softness. "And to your son it is *certain* to go, you see. Back to the old name soon."

"To my son?" echoed Rourke, with a quick laugh; "and who is my wife to be?"

"Miss Gaveston, of course."

"Oh!"

"As I said, Rourke," continued Bartle, uncomfortably aware that his way was very hard to make, "Winterfield is a fine farm, and you can make the house most comfortable."

"Comfortable! I will have it splendid. Eastern in its luxury. It shall eclipse Hohve while *he* holds sway there. Uncle Bart, there will be a deadly rivalry between us from this hour. He shall not look upon

me as a poor inferior. He shall do nothing at Hohve which I will not outdo at Winterfield."

"Ah! but, dear lad, be careful. Think where such recklessness might leave you, now that your income is only just sufficient to make the farm comfortable and pleasant. It is so possible to be happy without being rich, and you might succeed so easily. It all depends upon ourselves. The differences in our lives are only like the shaking of a kaleidoscope, after all; you can see as much beauty in one arrangement as another; and, though in reality all are entirely different, they are formed by the same bits of glass—I mean the same passions, and griefs, and ambitions, and joys. And, Rourke, dear lad, it is the wisest, and the kindest, and the gentlest hand in heaven that shakes them for us."

No answer from the young, stern lips, and Abram's heart fell.

"You are Rourke Trenham still, with your life to shape for yourself. What will it matter soon, my lad, whether the years were spent at Hohve or Winterfield?"

"It matters terribly to me."

"But it will not always," continued Abram, glad to hear the young man's softened tone. "You'll get so fond of Winterfield; and so accustomed to it, that I should not wonder at your actually objecting to go back to Hohve. Habit gets such a grip upon us. Why, I knew an ironfounder once who never fell asleep readily except when half a dozen men were hammering iron close to his ears. He told me this himself, and once I myself caught him sleeping like a baby in a furnace which a man was actually mending. Habit, dear lad, all habit; and I shan't be surprised to hear you say to me some day soon, 'Well, Uncle Bart, Hohve is ready for me now, you see; but I declare I feel so comfortably settled here that I should only consider it a bore to move.'"

"That day must be a long way hence," said Rourke, moodily, though he smiled at the old man's reasoning. "Now I suppose I must go. I am on my way to Rupert's Rest, uncle. Una must have the option of refusing a pauper husband."

"And if she does not do so?"

"If she does not do so, the wedding will be on the day first fixed."

"But will she like that?"

"Why not?" asked Rourke, testily.

"Mrs. Trenham was not *her* stepmother, and what respect would you have *me* show her memory?"

"True true," muttered Bartle, dismissing the subject in his old way. "Where do you go afterwards—to Hohve?"

"To Hohve!" laughed Trenham, ironically. "Why, what do you think me? No; I go to London by the night express. I have business there to-morrow morning. I will tell you of it when I return."

"Rourke, don't part with Brent," said the old farmer, asking no question about the business in London, perhaps because he guessed its import; "and—and—if ever you want money, you will remember that your mother's own sister was my wife, and that you are all the old man has to love."

"Oh, hush!" cried Rourke, in grieved impatience; "why should I want anything but your affection? God knows I want that, Uncle Bart, to keep me straight. There is Vere. I won't say good-bye, because I'm coming again to you soon."

Abram saw that he really shrank from the word; and so, nodding brightly, he let him go alone to the gate again while his dim eyes followed him with their old clinging gaze.

At Rupert's Rest the young men found Lucilla Vere, so full of the one subject of the morning, upon which she was enlarging to the girls, that she did not heed Athol's quiet signs to let the subject drop for the present.

Una was standing by Rourke, the loving smile still on her lips, though her hand had dropped from its clinging clasp about his fingers; Lorraine was in her seat at the window, from which she had only raised her head on Rourke's entrance, to give him as bright and quick a nod as if no trouble that she knew of lay within the reach of either; and Lucilla was sitting at elegant ease with her back to the light, asking a hundred excited questions—when Mr. Gaveston came in, bringing old Digby Surle with him. So engrossed were both by the incidents of the morning that Athol's anx-

ious hints were entirely unnoticed by them too.

"It seems the fashion to express sorrow, or sympathy, or some such rubbish on this occasion, Trenham," said Mr. Surle, tritely, "but I decline to do it. I'm not sorry for you. I know no reason why I should be. What is a young man worth if he cannot fight his own way with two such serviceable weapons as an arable farm of one thousand acres and five hundred a year? But I'll help you a little about it; I don't mind that. You must plough up the Loop at once. It is a good soil, and lying to waste as it is. Send away Brent, too, and get a bailiff who understands a barley and turnip soil. Then sell your stud—if they kept it up while you were away—and buy a good team. Why, I warrant if you are cautious, you can make a good thing of the place in twenty years' time."

"It wants capital to start with," said Mr. Gaveston. "If Trenham had plenty to lay out upon it to begin with——"

"You, too," put in Rourke, "would then promise me a farm worth calling good in twenty years' time! Cheering prospect for a man approaching thirty, and having no capital."

"You never cared to provide for a rainy day when you had the chance," said Digby; "so the natural consequences follow. As soon as you find it advisable you find it too late. You never had half the prudence of your mother's steward, and I don't know that I shall aid you with any more of my advice, it has been so perpetually rejected."

"Thank you," said Rourke, with quiet irony, "but I understand farming perfectly. My stepmother, in anticipation of this kindly deed, directed my education with a view to my earning my livelihood by a deft use of plough and harrow."

"Why, Rourke," exclaimed Una, in her simple credulity, "I thought it was quite the opposite. Papa said just now that your education had been that of a nobleman."

"Very opposite indeed to what it should have been," said old Mr. Surle, curtly.

"Very, considering this," assented Mr. Gaveston. "This act of Trenham's widow is as much an insult as an injury. But

Newley has the place only for life," he added, taking up the already threadbare consolation. "Whether he marries or not, it will be given up with his life, and his son can never touch it."

"Newley's a young fellow, like Rourke himself," put in Digby, with a relish; "five or six years make little difference in a man; and those placid, self-indulgent fellows are always long livers. He is canny, too, and will not only marry, but put by a fine portion for his widow and children. The first thing you see him do, Rourke, will be to cut the timber."

"He has been gradually doing that through the last seven years. I remarked it at once on my return."

"And resented it, eh? as having been done without your permission. But he did it wisely, preserving the beauty of the place; he had too shrewd a suspicion of to-day's triumph not to look after that. In a few years' time, though, it will be different. He is sure to marry; then he will begin at once to save. I suppose *your* marriage is knocked on the head now, eh, Trenham?"

Without resenting the unfeeling speech—few ever resented what the old man chose to say except Rourke himself, and he, to be sure, would not do so here—Rourke glanced down at Una, as if hoping she would answer him.

"That's what I came to say, Una," he began, with grave anxiety. "Your promise was not given to a poor and insignificant farmer. Try to feel that you have made me no promise at all."

"I cannot feel it," said Una; "I—I like to be promised to you, Rourke; and you know it was not your home I ever thought of loving, but yourself."

"Think well before you bind yourself again, child," struck in Digby, without giving the young man time to answer. "Trenham knows about as much of farming as a cow does of long division; and will be the worst in the world to bear privation or disappointment, or the assumption of others over him. Take your godfather's advice. He's the man to choose your husband, isn't he, Lucilla? You intend him to choose yours, eh?"

"It would be very nice," said Lucilla, looking shyly down.

"Of course, of course. You think so, too, Lorraine?"

"Not I. I advocate choosing my own—when the time comes," said the girl, fighting with the blushes that struggled to her cheeks.

"I cannot be thankful enough that Gaveston did not lure me into standing sponsor for *you*," snapped Mr. Surle, with his hard chuckle. "Without any exception at all, women excruciate one beyond ordinary torture; but, to be fit to live with, a woman should be pliable in one's hands as unbaked biscuit."

"Rather a want of crispness in that case," laughed Vere.

"Rubbish! If you have the crispness, you have the obstinacy and self-will. Better have ever so mild a dilution than that. Now then, child," he added, with a movement of his hand towards Una, "settle about this marriage before I go—you and young Romeo there."

"Romeo!" laughed Trenham; "a fine simile certainly, if you class Una with Rosalind."

Lorraine turned a little. She seemed to be searching for her needle in the work which she had laid down on the entrance of her visitors; but Athol did not start forward, as he would have done at other times. The quick drawing of her brows together, and the quivering of her lips, had told him now, beyond a doubt, that she had discovered Rourke's secret, and had read the meaning of his careless-seeming words; "but still," he said to himself, nourishing his hope, "it need not tell *more* than that she knew it."

"Who ever thought of classing Una with Rosalind," said her father, smiling. "No one thinks of Rosalind when Romeo is mentioned, nor dreams of separating Romeo from Juliet?"

"Except by death," said Rourke.

"Except by death," repeated Una, feeling that she was echoing his own meaning.

"Then you both are just as silly as you were before this morning dawned, eh?" inquired Digby; "and there is to be a marriage?"

"Do you still fully and kindly give your consent, as you did before I was—robbed of my property, Mr. Gaveston?" asked Trenham.

"Fully as I did then, if Una wishes it. My one sole desire, as you know, is to see her happy; and if she does not regret the state and luxury of Hohve, why need I? I shall still have my pet near me," he continued, trying to counteract a coldness of which he was himself conscious. The conclusion of his thought, which was that any day Hohve *might* revert to them, and that, at any rate, it would be his own grandson who would inherit the domain, he chose to suppress.

"You are both very good to me," said Rourke, not detecting anything but kindness in the decision of Una's father. "Lorraine, it is only you who have not spoken to me." He was facing her now at the window, and his gaze took in no one else in the room. "Say something vituperative about that thief at Hohve; you have no idea how I should enjoy hearing it."

"Of *him*?" said the girl, looking straight into his eyes with a flash of bright disdain; "of him! not I. Would I trouble myself to talk about a black-beetle, or an earwig, if it chanced to crawl into my way and annoy me?"

"But you could so readily put that *out* of your way," he said.

"And out of the way—of my thoughts—I can put him just as readily."

"You really feel this way towards him because he is my enemy?"

"I feel him just one hundred miles below my contempt. I feel him——" and, unthinkingly, words of unpremeditated girlish scorn were uttered, which Rourke was proud to hear, because her scorn was for the man who had wronged, not herself, but him.

"And yet you write to him?" he asked, longing for a word of disdainful denial of that.

A little pause, and then it all came back to her. In the remembrance of his wrong, she had forgotten, for that moment, the part she had marked out for herself. A little pause, because at first her tremulous lips refused to utter the words of quiet uncon-

cern, few as they were, with which she answered his earnest question.

"Yes; and yet I write to him."

"And you will do so still?"

No pause now. The negligent answer followed at once his puzzled inquiry: "More natural now still, don't you think? if he does not neglect his old correspondent—forgetting even my name. 'New made honor doth forget men's names,' you know."

"Rourke," put in Una, luckily joining them just then, and never noticing Rourke's speechless anger, "is it quite true that you are going away to-night?"

"Only to London for a few hours, Una"—she was standing close beside him, in the gentle clinging way which belonged to her—"you will be ready on the twenty-first, as we arranged?"

"But will it be—will it seem decorous?"

"If you wish it put off at all," he said, with quick nervousness, "I shall know that you wish it put off for ever."

"Shall you?" smiled Una, in the fulness of her unsuspecting love; "then I will never speak again of putting it off. I will be ready on the twenty-first."

"Thank you, my love. Thank you a thousand times."

One glance the sisters interchanged, one happy and loving glance, then the younger one looked round longingly for Miss Shefford or Athol. When she saw them talking together at a distance, she left the room herself, fancying she was unobserved.

The world was very chilly and gloomy to the girl just then, and the more she tried to make her thoughts clear and happy and straightforward ones, the more they seemed to grow wrong and intricate.

"Lorraine," said Miss Shefford, coming in to her presently, "Dr. Vere and Mr. Trenham are staying to dinner, I thought you would like to know before you finished dressing, but I see you have not begun. On what subject was this long brown study, dear?"

"I have been wondering over a good many things," said the girl, laying her hand wistfully on the old lady's shoulder, as they stood together before the fire. "Miss Shefford, cannot you tell me why my fa-

ther is so cold and indifferent to me? Surely you must know, and it might be easier to bear if I understood the reason of it."

"He is not cold and indifferent, dear. That is his general manner—to everyone but Una."

"Ah! you may well add that exception. But, Miss Shefford, why should he hold one child so very dear, and leave the other far off among only acquaintances?"

"I do not understand it myself," said Miss Shefford, heartily wishing she had not entered the room with her unnecessary message. "I could only tell you what others have told me, and what you yourself have heard. You know as well as I do, dear child, that at your birth—"

"My mother died—yes, I know that."

"In France?"

"Yes, I knew that from my name, long ago."

"And your father loved her so devotedly that he has never trusted himself to mention her name since—even to Una."

"She was like Una, of course?"

"I have heard so: but her portrait is kept now locked in his own premises. They were travelling in France," continued the old lady, "and when they reached some pretty place in Lorraine, where they had determined to stay for a time, Mr. Gaveston found letters which obliged his return home. He was detained longer than he expected, and when he went back it was to hear of your unexpected birth, and his wife's death. Dear, I often think there is a great excuse for his—for him now. Think of such a blow meeting him when he was hastening joyfully back to his wife!"

"Yet it might have been," the girl said dreamily, "that he could have taken me a little—to his heart—to make up."

"Hardly, dear," the old lady answered sorrowfully. "There was the other child. The one who was like her, the one who had loved her, and whom she had loved. The one who had been with them in their happiness, and had received her last word. Was it odd that the little one who had been the cause of her death, and had never received her mother's kisses—"

"Thank you, Miss Shefford," said Lorraine, interrupting her sadly, "that will do. I see why it is; and—I dare say it will never be different. Oh! how much better it would be if I were going away and Una staying here."

"But," said Miss Shefford, little guessing what other thoughts crowded this one, "the marriage is such a happy one for Una. She has never dreamed of caring for anyone but Mr. Trenham, and she has, to my knowledge, loved him for ten years. Such love could hardly be uprooted now, by any reverse of fortune such as to-day has seen."

"Not by *anything*," the girl said, almost solemnly. "Such love could never be uprooted by those who love her."

It was but a short evening the young men spent at Rupert's Rest, as Trenham had to drive in to Atton to catch the mail, and Athol persisted in going with him.

"It seems so odd, sir, for the master to be going without me," said Brent, when the train had left, and Athol turned to bid him good-night, "and odder still for me to have to prepare Winterfield for his coming home; it'll be such a desolate place for him at the best. If he'd only stay away and let us have time, I shouldn't mind, sir; but he's coming back at once, and says it shall be done afterwards. I know quite well how he'll look when he goes into it first."

"But you will make a great difference," said Athol, cheerily; "and I will come over as soon as I can in the morning."

"Thank you, sir," said Andrew, simply; but the young physician saw what a relief the promise gave him.

So, in the morning, Dr. Vere went; and while he could stay, he worked as hard as Brent did, and harder than Brent could make the men under him do. He waited to see Mrs. Sheriff install herself cheerfully there at the head of household affairs (preferring to be housekeeper to her young master even here, rather than keep her easy post at Hohve under the rule of its late steward), with one or two more of the old servants, the majority of whom were glad to retain their old quarters; then he began to see the house grow homelike. Yet could he only too keenly realise what a change

this life would be—at any rate for some time—to the young squire.

That morning Rourke spent chiefly in the private office of Messrs. Marshall & Sullivan; going from there with the senior partner to visit the Wills' Office in Doctors' Commons.

Mr. Marshall handed to the clerk a slip of paper, on which was written the name of his late client; then Rourke began to search through the heavy index volumes.

"Trenham."

There it was, and the clerk handed over the will to Mr. Marshall. It needed but little study from him, while Rourke's eyes followed more slowly; yet even *he* could distinguish how straightforward was the fact that everything—all estates, both real and personal—was devised and bequeathed by the testator to his wife.

Rourke's head was not raised until many minutes after the lawyer had ceased reading; then even the clerks noticed his angry sternness.

"Is our cab waiting?" asked the lawyer, fussily, to cover Rourke's odd manner. "Let us start, then. It is all right. We have seen what was needed. I wish you good morning."

And with a pleasant nod to the clerk, who was making his own surmises, Mr. Marshall ushered Trenham out into the street.

"There is nothing more to do, then?"

"No. It is, as I feared, as I was sure," the lawyer said, looking with elaborate, feigned interest out upon the passers by; "but you seemed doubtful, so it was best to read it over. No; we remain just where we were, Mr. Trenham."

Then he put various facts and projects, and selections of advice, and offers of help before Rourke; in a business-like but also very generous way; and though Rourke hardly seemed to hear, he remembered it all afterwards when he needed the help.

"I am going straight home now, Mr. Marshall," he said, with a laugh, when the lawyer tried in vain to tempt him to lunch; "straight home to Winterfield. That's a lying phrase, that hackneyed one of 'Home, sweet home.'"

"Wait a little before you condemn it," said the old man, cheerily; "wait until

you are settled with your pretty wife, or wait until you have your little ones about you. I shall hear a different tale when I come next into the country to see you. God grant I may!" he muttered to himself, as he entered his office again. "This is a villanous injury, an unprecedented fraud, to come so suddenly upon the squire's only son. Poor fellow!"

After all the trouble Rourke took to prepare himself for a gloomy house, and an untempting solitary dinner, all his proud cynical preparation was wasted. The old farm seemed decked in an improvised gala dress when its master returned, and the meal awaiting him—set out so substantially and so daintily in the long, brightly-lighted room—was a meal the novelty of which was to be as tempting to Rourke as its delicious and savory dishes. It was what Mrs. Sheriff called a "substantial tea," far more appetising, considering all things, and quite as satisfying, she said, as any dinner she ever had overlooked at Hohve.

But this meal was not for the master alone in his solitude. It had other charms which a dinner at Hohve had never possessed; for there about the snug, warm room, waiting for him, was quite a happy-looking group of guests. There were Una and Lorraine; there were Miss Shefford and Lucilla Vere; and there were Athol and Abram Bartle.

Rourke drew his hand across his eyes as if the surprise had dazzled him; then the full kindness of this thought swept over him and he stood among these guests of his, conscious—as they made him feel—that he was entertaining, under his own roof those whom he loved best in all the world. No wonder that it was the heartiest, merriest meal that the old farm had ever witnessed in its day; having, to be sure, never received a group who tried so generously and considerately—and with such true refinement—to make the evening a happy, and even a gay one, for their host. No wonder either that Brent, in his self-imposed office of waiter, could hardly keep his grateful eyes so bright and clear as usual.

The one thought stirring each that night—the determination to do their part in bringing the sunshine into that grim old

house—was nobly and even tenderly carried out; and a certain warm and radiant sunshine flooded it from floor to ceiling.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the few weeks between Rourke Trenham's return from London and his marriage, a great change was effected at Winterfield. Its interior arrangement, as far as possible within its narrow limits, eclipsed those of Hohve. Its grounds were laid out with far more care than were those surrounding Rourke's old home. Indeed, under his direction and active, as well as constant, management, the old farm was made a picturesque and even luxurious home. Yet his one most often recurring reflection was, How different Hohve would have looked, if he had bestowed proportionate care and expense in preparing that for his wife!

"It is almost like settling in Miriam's cottage," he would say bitterly, when Athol praised the comfort and the beauty of the place.

Athol never argued the matter; simply laughed at the idea, and entered with keener interest than ever into all the improvements and alterations in farmstead and home. Neither did he ever try to persuade Rourke to leave anything to be finished during his wedding tour; knowing how good the constant occupation was for him; how his best friend now was "Nature's Physician," as Galen calls employment. True, he was restless, and ill at ease, through all, but far less so than he would have been if he had had to spend those weeks in idle wooing only.

The farm, too, began to look flourishing under the never-tiring and ever-cheerful supervision of Abram Bartle, whose advice Rourke Trenham could always as frankly seek as he could fearlessly take.

The Winterfield Lodge, as it was called, was upon the Hohve side of the gate, so Rourke had no power now to give its occupation to his valet, or exercise any right, either in forbidding or allowing it to be Rhoda Burke's home. But one end he did exert his influence to obtain, the indefinite delay of Brent's marriage; much to Andrew's surprise, because only lately his

had seemed anxious to smoothe the r it. Lorraine, the time dragged far more. It seemed as if Una's love was way from her now, and she was left an old craving for affection stronger and more unsatisfied than ever. Often during those weeks, while Una would be with Rourke, would she try to tempt her father some words of love, but it was of little use, and she turned again to her loneliness, remembering drearily the love offered her, and knowing that her unthinking words long years ago had rue—she was neither better nor happier being more loved. But no one guessed how cruelly these thoughts visited the girl. How could it be guessed, when he was always ready and interested in the very smallest particulars of Una's life? She cheerily headed all solemn wishes, planned and stitched and packed as was, in short, the most necessary, as the most beautiful, thing about her life. Poor child! and the only treat and expense she asked, was a long, lonely ride at times when thought was heaviest; a lonely ride when she was sure Rourke and Una were together, and she never could meet him in the meadows and quiet lanes. As time went on to Una's wedding-day, the only one incident to break it for her. Digby Surle elected to give a dinner at The Priory, and to break through the egocentric rule about never asking the Trenham and Una Gaveston together. In fact, this dinner was understood to be given particularly in honor of the couple. The invitation to Rupert's side of course included Lorraine, but she had declined it for her, as they were two friends of Una's staying in the house at the time, and the carriage would contain more than four—Miss Shefford had been particularly invited, to swell the party element, always so deficient at The Priory. Lorraine only told them that she did not mind. They had not have believed her if she had added that an intense relief she felt it to be able to stay at home alone—because she was to be there.

Mr. Surle was entertaining his guests as hospitably as the brusque selfishness of his habits and customs would allow, and Lorraine was dawdling over her solitary tea, when the London train deposited Rourke Trenham on the platform of the Atton station, looking—in his winter travelling dress—very unlike what he ought to have looked at that moment, sitting beside his bride-elect in The Priory dining-room.

"I brought the dog-cart, sir, though you said you should walk," said Brent, coming forward in his new livery; for Brent—who chose to be groom and various other things as well as valet, now that his master's staff of servants was so seriously diminished—chose to act each part to perfection, and in suitable costume.

"Then you may take it back," said Rourke, curtly; "I intended to walk, or I should not have said so. Did you take my note to The Priory?"

"Yes, sir. I met Mr. Surle in the avenue, and gave it to him. He seemed vexed that you had been called to town, and said he wished he had known before."

"You told him that I did not know myself until the hour I went?"

"Yes, sir. He said you ought not to have gone."

"Of course he did," laughed Rourke. "He would not miss saying something of that kind. Now drive off."

"I thought perhaps if you drove sir, you would have time to go over for an hour or two."

"No; I intend to walk."

"He seemed very anxious, sir, and it is not late. It was only as I came out into the road that Mr. Gaveston's carriage passed me on its way there, and the ladies would not be late. Miss Lorraine's maid—I met her—says they are all gone but her."

"But who?"

"But Miss Lorraine. The carriage was full though, for Mr. Gaveston was on the box."

"As you have the horses here, I will drive."

Andrew hurried to dismiss the man from the horses' heads. He was no less pleased than surprised at his master's sudden decision.

"I knew he'd feel done up, and like to drive," he thought to himself, simple and unsuspecting fellow that he was! Less than an hour afterwards, Trenham had changed his dress, dined, and ridden over to Rupert's Rest.

"Mr. Trenham."

Lorraine started from her seat in vexed surprise. "Why?" she faltered, not troubling herself to explain the question.

"I may ask why, too," said Rourke, taking her hand, though she had not offered it; and trying to seem entirely at his ease, as he was not. "I thought you were all to dine at The Priory. I was obliged to send an apology and go up hastily to town this morning."

"Then why did you come here?"

"Because," he said, answering proudly the timid questioning of her eyes, "Brent told me you were here. Do you think, knowing that, I could deny myself a moment's delight in coming to look upon your face for once, while no other eyes rested there?"

"How did you come?" she asked; the common-place question, a refuge for her in her fear and distrust of herself.

"I rode."

"It is very dark for riding."

As she spoke she drew back the curtains of one of the windows, and opened the shutters. She would do anything rather than stand there beside Rourke, waiting for what he might mean to say.

"Yes; very dark," she repeated, pressing her face against the pane and wishing she need not turn back to the lighted room again.

"The darkness makes little difference to me, said Rourke, gently drawing her from the window, and closing the shutters and curtains again. "We will keep the chill and darkness from here though, Lorraine; the very thought of it has made you shiver. There," he said, moving back into the room, with just the easy grace which belonged to him, and showing no sign of how his heart was beating. "Lorraine, I came to ask that one question again—for the last time—the question I asked you on that last night in London. You know what it is."

All at once her quiet firmness returned. The part that she had given her play, and played so well as yet, shot kept up steadily to the end.

"All questions you have ever asked were answered at the time," she said ply. "Why ask me this again—ever it be?"

His anger at her cool and wilful misconception burst at once the restraint he put upon himself.

"You know the question. Must be as they are arranged to be?"

"Why should any thing be re-arranged, Mr. Trenham?"

"Won't you understand me?" he passionately. "Then I must explain *ly*. Is it right for me—loving you—as—to marry your sister? There, it is up to you to decide. But understand it as I may make you. Try to realize how hard it is for me now ever to speak to her without dreaming it is you who address; or to think of the wife I win in a few days, without fancying this being so—if you *can* realize it right for me to marry Una? As I you shall decide." The words were in their slow, clear emphasis.

"It is right," she gently said, every man to marry the girl whose part he has won. You must see this, Mr. Trenham, without my decision, or advise whatever you may call it."

"Lorraine, if you were Una, should still advise me so? Try to put you in her place—unwilling as you may be for a moment, to imagine yourself in her place to me. If you were, and some one else grown dearer to me than the light of your eyes, should you wish me kept to my engagement? Or should you say, later love is immeasurably deeper than this; *that* should be the one to give you through life? Answer me truthfully, my child."

For a moment she stood silent, poised to stay the brilliant color which she held its sway upon her wistful face. Then she knew she could guard her secret still, and could answer calmly and coolly in spite of the *flattering* of her

"I should not say it, Mr. Trenham."

please don't call me a child. I am as old for a woman as you are for a man. How would you like to hear me call you a child?" The winning voice grew suddenly quiet in her distress. She regretted keenly having put them together—even thus.

"I should love it," exclaimed Rourke, eagerly, "if you used it as I used it. I should love to hear you call me anything with *my* before it."

"Nobody," returned Lorraine, with unmistakable emphasis, "would think of saying *my* of a thing they did not possess, or even covet. Then just think of the absurdity of applying it to anything which belongs to another."

"Lorraine"—his hands grasping the back of a low chair near her, shook even in their strained clasp; his eyes had a fierce light in their depths; plainer than ever was marked the line between his brows which showed the constant presence of one harrowing thought—"Lorraine, from my soul I feel that you might love me—ay, in spite of all—if you would try. I should not despair, if you would let me woo you. Why should you not learn in time to love me? Others have. Una did, and I never woo'd her in one month as I have woo'd you in one minute."

"I know—I am certain," the girl said, in all deep truth, "that I shall never grow to love you any better—never—never."

"Why have you changed so much in that since you were a child?" asked Rourke, drawing his hand slowly across his forehead, as the words—which he knew to be the truth—fell heavily upon his heart. "You said then——"

"*You* changed," interrupted Lorraine, her feigned nonchalance hardly hiding her eager haste; "you did not grow up so nice as—as you seemed then."

"Grow up!" echoed Rourke ironically; "I was grown up then. I never changed, until you changed me. No; it was you who changed—my beautiful, beautiful child; and, most of all, to me. Why is it? I cannot find that you love elsewhere. If I did, I could understand it. I try and try forever to make it clear, but never can. Your affection for Vere is far too calm and

natural and sisterly a one to—to explain this; and as for others; whoever may seek you, you are the same to all. Whom do you love?"

"Una," said the girl, with an earnest meaning in her voice.

"And no one else? No one in that unmistakable way in which I love you? O Lorraine! let me try to win you. I *could* make you happy, my sweet; I know it, I feel it. I am not good, I know; I am headstrong, and selfish, and covetous; but I love you with so all-absorbing a love, and you have such power over me, that I feel as if I could satisfy you. I cannot speak in conceit, because I know you do not care for me now; but I know how it would change me to be cared for by you. I am different with you, even now while you hold yourself so far from me. Ah! you cannot judge what it might be if I could call you wife. My darling, listen to this prayer of mine before it is too late."

"It is too late now," the girl said, very softly.

"Not too late *yet*," he cried, the scarlet rushing to his cheeks and brow; "I am not bound yet. Oh! my beloved, one word and I am yours for all eternity; one word, sweetheart; one whisper only."

His chest was heaving with suppressed emotion; his hands were trembling like a girl's, as he held them to her. His love, in its momentary flash of hope, had burst through all restraint of words, and Lorraine shrank from him, trembling in her pain.

"Look! Look how terribly I am in earnest. Can you start from me. Is there any one in all the world who lays before you such a love as mine, and to whom you could bring such a blessing? My sweet; dear, my sweet; give me one word of hope."

Her hands were locked together, her eyes were growing hot and wide in their misery. How could she answer him this once to end it all, and hold her secret still within her heart? Why could she not have ended it long ago? Had her face *always* denied to him the falsehoods that her lips had dared to utter?

"Rourke," she said, and there was a great, quiet courage in her voice, though

the words were broken, "let me speak to you to-night—just once—in all seriousness. You will never, I know, oblige me to do so again when it is so painful, because you are a great deal too kind. I never knew what it was to have a brother, Rourke; but ever since I have known of your engagement to Una, I have known what pleasure it might be; and there is no one else I could so happily think of as my—Una's husband. You never had a sister either, had you, Rourke? I am so glad that you never can have any one but me, and I will try so hard to be a true one to you, that you may always love the name of sister—for my sake. But—but, Rourke," the courage of the beautiful sweet voice was failing a little now, "you will promise never to speak again to me as—you have spoken to-night. Nothing you could say would ever move me—nothing. It is only causeless pain and excitement for us both, and puts us farther apart, instead of bringing us nearer together. We shall be such firm, true friends when you have made this promise. O Rourke, dear friend, let us be brother and sister from to-night."

They were *her* hands which were outstretched entreatingly; but all unheeded and unseen, for beside the chair on which he had been leaning he was kneeling now, his face buried in his arms as they rested on the back of it.

"Rourke, I take the promise as if you spoke it. It can be a silent one between us, and yet a sacred one always. When I think of you as my brother—my *brother Rourke*, it is so pleasant to me to say it!—I do care for you really. I—I wish I had never caused you unhappiness. I could not help it, and I will try to make up for it. You loved Una dearly before you saw me; I wish—no I will not say I wish you had never seen me, because presently we are all going to be so happy."

She saw the kneeling figure dim and blurred through the hot tears that would not fall, but she had no fear of his touching the old wound again, so she laid her hand one moment softly on his bent head; and then, knowing in her womanly instinct what would be kindest, she left him in the room alone.

Standing at her own window in the darkness, she waited, listening for his horse's tread. The heavy clouds hung black and low, and made the night's silence more complete; still she felt no fear for him when the horse's step fell on her ear at last, sure, and swift, and steady.

But when it died in silence, all the girl's strength and calmness gave way with terrible suddenness, and there came upon her such a fit of sobbing, as she had not known before, even through all her solitary youth and girlhood. When the passionate tears had exhausted themselves at last, she tried with every power she possessed to calm and steady her bewildered thoughts. She would pray; she had heard and read of prayer soothing and quieting, when nothing else could. But when she tried, a hundred thoughts and longings started up between her raised eyes and the Heaven they sought; a hundred memories dragged down her uplifted hands. Another hope came. She would plead aloud with her Father; her thoughts could hardly wander then. She had, once or twice, overheard Una doing so, and had noticed how bright and calm she would be afterwards. Sentence after sentence the girl framed, sometimes in a reverent whisper, sometimes in a yearning cry; but still the words she uttered hovered only about her lips, or died in the blackness round her. No word, as well as no thought, had power or purity to pierce the far-off Heaven from whence the answer was to come. So she said to herself, forgetting, poor child, that it is not given us to know where our broken, faltering words may fall. No, she could not pray as Una did. So, with a weary sigh, she rose from her knees, and crept back eagerly and timidly into the warm, bright empty room.

As she took her seat close to the fire again—for she was shivering drearily—her eyes fell on a Bible lying on one of Una's little tables, and a thought struck her. *That* would help her in her doubt and darkness, and would still her in her unrest. She would open it at random and read the verse on which her finger chanced to rest. She had been told of others doing so, and finding, or perhaps *being led to*, just the

words which comforted or helped them most. She took the Book on her lap, and opened it with her eyes closed; then bent to read the verse on which her finger lay.

"A continual dropping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike."

There was little help for her in that. She would try again. Easily the Book fell open, and she stooped to read again with eager eyes.

"So Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah, his son, reigned in his stead."

No, not yet; no help, no comfort, and no lesson there. Once more she would try. The third time was always the best. She would open this time purposely in the New Testament. She liked its simple words the best. Thinking this thought, of course her fingers strayed there; and when the book opened near its close, her fingers clung to the spot on which it lay as if afraid of losing these words, which would surely be what she sought.

"Last of all the woman died also."

She closed the Book tiredly, and laid it back in its place, wondering how its soothing ought to be sought, and its help won, by prayer.

Starting presently from her crouching attitude before the fire, she glanced at herself pityingly, as it were, in the mirror above.

"I—I look a miserable object," she said, "and Una will detect it at once. I seem to have tried in vain every means of—of seeing things less hazy and dismal. What shall I do now? I—I know" (with a little laugh); "I'll do my hair."

When the carriage returned from The Priory, and the girls trooped into their sitting-room, eager to tell all the incidents of the party to the one who had been absent, they found her presiding merrily over the preparations for their refreshment—her soft, dark hair dressed daintily, her beautiful young face even gay in its welcome.

At Hohve Cottage, Dr. Vere waited up alone for the return of Mr. Surle's guests; and, wearied by his day's work, dozed before the fire. Lucilla was sharing the brougham of an old lady patient of his, who had been invited to this dinner of

old Digby's, and it was after midnight when at last he heard the wheels beyond the little garden. Hastening to the gate, he was in time to thank the old lady.

"I was very sorry not to see *you* there, Dr. Vere," she said, with all sincerity; "besides which, I never like to hear of doctors being busy. I hope yours was a concocted excuse, though I am afraid you do not deal in them. You see we were disappointed of many of our young people, having neither Mr. Trenham nor Lorraine Gaveston."

Athol shook the outstretched hand, and drew back from the carriage door, hardly knowing why his heart sank at hearing of the absence of those two.

"I never guessed that Trenham would not be there to-night, Lucilla," he said, as he followed his sister into the lighted room, where he had coffee ready for her; "and where was Lorraine?"

"No room in the carriage, I believe," returned Lucilla, folding her cloak upon the table. "Rourke is in London to-day."

"Why, Lucilla!" exclaimed her brother, starting a little, "what a magnificent dress! I had no idea you could muster anything so—"

"I know what you are going to say," she put in, pettishly, as she slowly drew off her tightly-fitting gloves, "expensive and extravagant, and all that kind of thing, you mean. I know what you would always have me do, just go out as dowdy as an old widow; you invariably open your eyes most disagreeably, if I look at all like other girls."

"Do I?" asked Athol, good-humoredly; "I must have very round-looking eyes by now. But this dress does really surprise me more than usual."

"Only because you haven't seen it before," explained Lucilla, curtly, as she poured herself a cup of coffee. "It is only a plain satin after all, and I bought the lace second-hand from a poor woman in Atton, who had been a ladies'-maid, and had it got up to look as good as new. You need not stare at the train; it is no longer than all ladies wear now. Una Gaveston has quite as long a one, so had the girls who came with her."

"Is not there a difference between their means and yours, Lucy?" asked her brother quietly, putting down his untasted coffee.

"Of course there is," assented Lucilla, not uttering her idea that if she did not make the most of her appearance now, she lost her only chance of eventually possessing Una's means. "I hate to go out a dowdy," she added aloud: "and it is for your sake quite as much as my own; people talk so."

"I do not mind."

"I dare say not. Men have no need to mind, perhaps; and then they think it despicable in women to do so. I tell you, Athol, men can never understand either women's temptations to look well, or the tactics absolutely *necessary* for some women."

"I do not wish to understand," said Athol, feeling as little what she meant as a young man could.

"I couldn't have gone ill-dressed to-night. I—I hate to be looked down upon (or pitied, of all horrible things!) by girls who are younger than myself, and richer, and prettier, and luckier in every way. You can never comprehend how horrible it is."

"Una Gaveston would never look down upon you, as you say, dear."

"Perhaps not; but the other people would have done so, and would do any time when I may give them the chance. Besides, I thought Lorraine would be there to-night."

"But *she* would never have—what do you call it?—looked down upon you," said Athol, really surprised, as he stooped to poke the fire into a blaze.

"No; but don't you see what I mean? Somehow, one always looks dowdy beside her, unless one takes care to prevent it. I don't know how it is, but she has such a grace about her. Everything looks beautiful on her, whatever it may be; and her face casts other faces into the shade. Ah! the gift of beauty is a wonderful gift, Athol, whatever people may say."

"In satin and lace," said Athol, touching his sister's voluminous dress.

"Is not blue satin and lace an elegant

combination?" inquired Lucilla, cheerfully. "It looked so well in those big rooms."

"That's right, dear," he said, trying to speak genially; "I only wish I could imagine that it was paid for."

"Oh! you needn't fidget about that," she answered, a little uneasily for all her confidence; "I know my godfather is going to leave me something really handsome. I *know* it, Athol, and I will tell you how—some day. So I am not going to deny myself everything now while it is really a pleasure to me to have things; and then have the power of having them when I don't care for them. If I haven't the money in my hands, I can get what I want now on account of Mr. Surle's legacy; and so can you, Athol, because, of course, we shall both reap the benefit."

"I would not trade on such expectation to escape the direst poverty," said the young physician seriously. "Lucy, how can you do it? Mr. Surle is only leading you on, to laugh at you at last."

"But I happen to know differently, Athol," she put in, with a confident smile.

"My dear, don't let yourself be so deceived; and, above all, don't be led into dishonesty through it. That is a plain word, but it will be so in the end, if you build on any expectations from him. Why, what generosity is there in him that should induce him to do this for you?"

"He has always been very generous to me."

"How?" queried Athol, growing hot at the idea, staunch and honorable as he was. "He asks you to the Priory occasionally; and, seeing what you wish, leads you cruelly on in your false hopes. Has he ever done more for you? Has he ever helped you to be careful and content, or happy? Has he ever put himself out of the way to help anybody—even his own only nephew? Lucy, my dear, listen in time. If you trust to him you will fall deeper and deeper, day by day, into degrading difficulties, from which he will never hold out so much as a finger to rescue you."

"But I happen to know better, you see," returned Lucilla, with a careless little nod.

"He is a miser, of course; we all know

that; but will not that make it all the better for us afterwards? Yes, a real miser," she repeated, enjoying the idea. "Athol, what do you think he said to-night? He was telling Sir Peter Vaughan of his walks into Atton, after some of his men of business; and Sir Peter, in his little shrill way, asked him why he walked, instead of going by rail. 'Why?' echoed old Digby, turning upon him as sharp as a razor. 'Did you ask why, sir? Because boots last longer than railway tickets, that's why.' You should have seen Sir Peter's queer glance at the servants and the appointments of the table. He evidently could not reconcile things."

"And do you dream he is saving for *you*, Lucilla?" asked her brother, without a smile.

"Yes, partly, I'm glad to say."

"And I'm sorry."

"Cross, you mean. Go to bed, Athol. I shall sit up a few minutes longer, as I suppose I have no fire in my room. Good night."

But before he left her, Athol repeated his earnest entreaty; promising, as he had promised a hundred times before, to work for her hard and unceasingly, if she would depend on him alone, and not let herself be tempted by delusive hopes to act in any way but with exact and scrupulous honor. And then he kissed her and told her what pleasure it was to him to work for her; and how, as they two were all the home contained, it should be a pleasure for them to help each other; and that presently he hoped he should have need to deny her nothing.

Younger of the two as he was, his words had always the gentle protecting helpfulness of an elder brother's; and were never quite without their effect, though he might not know it.

When Lucilla followed him upstairs, the pencilled line around her eyelids was ruined by her tears, and her thoughts were more regretful than envious, whatever envy they might still contain.

"But it's so different from other girls," she mused, walking slowly past her brother's door, with her rich dress held carefully about her. "They have money, or parents, or years of youth before them. I can-

not be single and dependent upon Athol all my life—Athol, who would like to marry—who, of course, deserves a wife; who may—just possibly may—marry a young, beautiful, happy girl. Oh; think of it then! Athol's young courted wife patronizing his old-maid sister. I never could live so, never. I must marry. All girls marry if they can—and all cannot do it without trying. All are not like Una. Ah!" she broke off, with a sigh most real and straight from her dissatisfied heart, "*She* has had no drawbacks all her life. She has never known what it is to be short of money, or to look shabby, or to have to worry about to-morrow; and now she has won the highest and handsomest gentleman in the county for her husband. If he isn't the richest now, he will be again, I suppose. Yes; things are shared very unequally, and I must think so, whatever Athol says," she repeated, setting down her candle, and wiping the discolored tears from her cheeks.

After that day the preparations went on more busily than ever at Rupert's Rest, until the dawning of that chilly bright November day which was to see Una made a wife. The old church looked very beautiful that morning, but she hardly saw it; nor did Rourke look round him through the service, though no one guessed what his eyes avoided. Lorraine noticed it, and was glad in her heart. She knew she could keep this service bright in her memory when they were gone; re-picturing Una just as she was then; and Rourke, strong and brave and tender, at her side, looking on no one else.

It was not until the guests were gathering in the drawing-room at Rupert's Rest, and Lorraine entered the room, that his eyes for the first time were suffered to reach her. Lucilla Vere, standing beside him at that moment, but seeing nothing but the swift, intent gaze, began idly to chat of Lorraine as she had been chatting of various others.

"Lorraine looks pale to-day, doesn't she, Rourke? She seems to feel most acutely this parting with her only sister. You see a sister never can be the same after she marries."

"I suppose not."

"That's a dreadfully trying dress for any girl by daylight; but Lorraine bears it pretty well, doesn't she? I'm sorry she has so fallen off in her looks since she went to London last."

"Fallen off?" echoed Rourke. "Then it passes me, Lucilla, to imagine what she was before she fell."

"Does it?" questioned Miss Vere, a little discomfited. "Just notice how enthralled Mr. Spencer seems. He says no man in the priesthood ought to marry and I feel sure he never thinks of falling in love; yet how he brightens up when he talks to her, and how hard he tries to get an opportunity to talk to her!"

"I do not wonder."

"Why? She is not a good girl; at any rate, not a particularly good girl. So why should good men be attracted by her?"

Rourke Trenham's eyes involuntarily strayed to the speaker's brother. "Another good man," he thought to himself, as if trying to gain some pleasure from the idea; "and he deserves her."

"I really believe Mr. Spencer is a thoroughly good man, whatever some may say," continued Miss Vere, still making energetic use of her eyes. "Do you like his preaching, Mr. Trenham?"

"I never go to hear it."

"Really? how can you confess it?" she said, with a shocked laugh, though she, as well as the whole neighborhood, had noticed that Rourke Trenham had never been seen at church since his stepmother's will had been read to him. "But at any rate you heard him to-day?"

"I was there to-day; unmistakably, yes."

"You don't dislike him?"

"Dislike him? No, I think him a capital fellow. I have asked him over to shoot with me again and again, but he never comes."

"I should think not," laughed Lucilla; "he must have been surprised."

"He was," said Rourke, placidly. "But I thought it would be a change for him now and then. He has a good deal to put up with in the parish, like the rest of us; we give him credit for being able to do nothing but preach, and every one of us

thinks he can do it better. Isn't that something to have to put up with?"

"Lorraine seems rather tired of him," said Lucilla, her eyes following the diminutive black-clad figure which moved about the chief bridesmaid.

"I should think," Rourke said, his eye fixed steadfastly upon the clergyman—*and upon him only*, "that Athol might find him a useful study of brain preponderation over body."

And then he moved away, for Una had entered the room.

"Athol," said Lorraine, when Dr. Ver joined her for a few minutes, before the guests moved to the room where the breakfast was served, "Mr. Bartle does not come, you see. I have been hoping up to this instant. We were so anxious for him to be here, and I begged so earnestly for his promise."

"I never expected him; indeed I knew he would not come, because, when I mentioned the subject, his tooth began to ache."

"He—he is not happy lately about Rourke; is he?"

"Why not?" asked Athol, anxious to chase from her face the very shadow of a shade. "What is there but happiness for Rourke to-day? Of course it was the toothache, dear. Don't you know that 'there was never yet philosopher who could endure the toothache patiently'? What a crowd we are, are not we? And how proud your father looks of the bride!"

"No wonder," the girl answered, softly; and then the guests fell into pairs and left the room.

After the breakfast—which seemed to Lorraine, with its toasts and wishes, and thanks and laughter, to have lasted a long day—the bride and bridegroom were driven from the door amid a shower of gay good-byes; and Lorraine stood in the crowd upon the terrace, while the bell chimed deafeningly and maddeningly in her ears.

But she felt nothing, save the touch of Rourke's fingers in his last good-bye—*he had been the last of all—and saw nothing but the look in his sad eyes, which said* "I have kept my promise, and I will keep it; but I cannot forget."

CHAPTER XV.

ROURKE TRENHAM and his wife returned to Winterfield for Christmas; and from that time began Rourke's open, daring rivalry of the possessor of his old home. Everything that Newley did at Hohve was, as Rourke had said it should be, outdone at Winterfield. If Newley had at all imagined it would be easy to eclipse the late squire, that imagination could have lasted but a very short time. Whatever he might attempt, or successfully carry out, at Hohve, was presently excelled by something originated by Rourke at Winterfield.

This, with the working of his own projects about the grounds and house and farm, was a great exhaustive of Rourke's limited wealth; and so what marvel was it that gradually his "money troubles" (as Abram Bartle simply called that yawning, hungry monster we call Debt) came closely about him to hem him in.

Una had returned from her wedding tour, looking well and happy enough to satisfy her sister's heart to overflowing; but this brightness, both of health and spirits, faded a little as the year went on.

Lorraine puzzled over this; for, though she always studiously avoided discussing Rourke's private affairs she knew that his young wife was as ignorant as herself about any financial matters which might or might not be harassing her husband; and guessed even less than she did of the sort of lenders to whom he had recourse beyond his own solicitors.

Horton Newley had a widowed sister acting as mistress of the ceremonies at Hohve; a handsome, hospitable, laughter-loving woman, who possessed a substitute for every virtue under the sun, in her consummate, womanly tact; frank-seeming, modest-sounding, and winning—beyond truth—as being all things to all men.

Who her defunct husband had been in his day was never very distinctly understood; but she spoke of him with so much innocent, tender regret, and made such easy, natural allusions to his Rectory (which, without a word of description, she gave her hearers to understand was a most luxurious and extensive dwelling), that she literally shamed away suspicion.

At the first it had seemed that the whole neighborhood was to hold aloof from Hohve, however much its hospitality might have been courted in other times; but gradually this feeling dispersed like a thunder-cloud, and left the wide-open gates more inviting than their wont.

Of course, Mrs. Trenham's will had been a most unjust one; but, after all, it was absurd to visit the injustice on the man who, in all ignorance, he affirmed, had happened to reap the benefit. His birth, they were given to understand, had been unexceptionable; his manners and bearing were those of a gentleman; and his sister was the widow of a rector who had apparently held a high position in the Church, and moved in the best society.

Under these circumstances, it would be no less than unjust to ban Mr. Newley as a mere ill-bred interloper, and indeed only simple justice to be civil to him. Whether it would have been the same simple justice if he had stepped into Winterfield, instead of Hohve, of course was never needed to be proved; and no one thought it necessary to discuss the insane question with himself.

There were no such dinners given anywhere as at Hohve; combining all the attractions of a bachelor repast with the advantage of ladies' society, and the achievements of an experienced French cook. And, to vary the dinners, there was an endless succession of picnics, garden parties, dances, contests in sports of all kinds, shooting and boating excursions, and riding parties. Every festivity that could make Hohve attractive, and could collect a gay and aristocratic throng about it, was planned and carried out, regardless alike of time and trouble and expense in its achievement. No other house had at its head a lady bent, as Horton Newley's sister was, on providing amusement for herself and those about her; who could do it quite so successfully as she could; and who, in rich and elegant mourning, could be deemed simply "jolly," where many another woman would have been pronounced "fast." Besides that, she had always friends staying at the house, pleasant and genial women like herself; good sports-

men; attractive girls; all importing an element of genial hilarity into the county, whether or not their pedigrees would have borne investigation.

Then Horton Newley made such a pleasant host, deferentially seeking the opinions of the old squires, courteously flattering their wives through their marriageable daughters; courting these all equally (yet all suggestively), with that tact which was evidently a family virtue.

And so, somehow, it came to be acknowledged that, for abundant and dainty fare, for genial enjoyment and sport, and for that very essence of flirtation which leaves its performers unfettered to love and ride away at will, Hohve was unrivalled. Certainly there were still a few families who held aloof from all intercourse with the steward and his unknown sister; who whispered that the late Mr. Dugard had been a childish old rector led blindfold to his marriage; who hinted that Mrs. Dugard's smiles and caresses were rather too freely lavished to be of much value; and who surmised that the intruder at Hohve had some hidden purpose of his own in these grand doings, which it might be well to be cautioned against. Chief among those who thought this—though never amongst those who said it—were Mr. Gaveston and Athol Vere—we do not say his sister, for Lucilla had been soon whisked into the whirlpool of gaiety at Hohve, and her brother's hand could not restrain her—chief among those who thought it and said it, were Abram Bartle and Lorraine Gaveston.

And so, from the beginning, it had been a tacitly understood thing that the neighborhood should form itself into three cliques. The first included those who clung staunchly to the deposed squire, and held Horton Newley in contempt. The second, those who considered themselves privileged friends of the master of Hohve, and looked on Rourke Trenham as an arrogant and untamable young farmer who, in his present position, showed an ill grace in holding himself aloof from better men. And the third included those whose doors were, with equal readiness, opened to either of the foes, and who, considering the feud amusing and rather incomprehen-

sible, gave to either of the young men the same welcome. But even they never ventured to run the risk of a meeting on their own hearth.

Mr. Gaveston was one of those to whose house Horton Newley was never invited, and who never accepted an invitation to Hohve, yet he often met him at the houses of common friends. It might have been expected that Newley would soon in despair, if not in pique, give up sending his "requests for the pleasure of Mr. and Miss Gaveston's society," considering the quiet contempt with which such documents were invariably treated, but it never was so; and presently the whole neighborhood grew to understand the reason of this. Even Rourke himself became aware of what he considered *then* must be the crowning point of Horton Newley's arrogance.

It was understood by everyone notwithstanding no one seemed to know through whom, or by what means—that Mr. Newley, of Hohve, was a suitor for the hand of Miss Gaveston, of Rupert's Rest. Though he never entered her home as an honored—or even invited guest, yet, with perfect frankness, as if it were as natural a thing as possible, he let it be seen and talked of, that he was paying his addresses to Lorraine Gaveston; and stood as fair a chance as any man, "though of course," he owned, pleasantly, "it was *but* a chance that every man stood." Whispers of amusement, of astonishment, and of contempt were indulged in.

It was cool, indeed, for Horton Newley to acknowledge his wooing of one of the most beautiful, as well as one of the most high-born, ladies in the county; but beyond measure so when this lady was the sister of Trenham's wife. So said the little country-world, but there was only one man there who knew why Rourke's heart was so terribly stirred within him at this news.

Rourke grew to watch the girl with fierce intentness when Mr. Newley's name was mentioned in her presence, while she treated the matter—which had now become a jest against her—in a way which thoroughly baffled him. Not with indifference, not with scorn, but with a light defiant

which might have hidden anything—as Rourke knew.

In his eagerness to discover what chance there might be for Lorraine's eventually caring for this man, he even accustomed himself to mention him; and the oftener he did so the easier it grew to him, though it was always with the same stifled contempt. Unsuccessful in his efforts to discover Lorraine's feelings so, he even schooled himself to question Mr. Gaveston; but the girl's father was apparently too indifferent on the subject to care to discuss it. At last he brought up the subject to Athol Vere; but to the young physician, in his staunch, unquestioning love, it was too ridiculous for discussion. At the sound of his hearty laugh, Rourke's heart leaped; not to sink again until he should hear of some new endeavor on the part of Newley to ingratiate himself in Lorraine's favor; which endeavor was, if made known at all, invariably represented as successful. If Rourke himself could have seen Lorraine in Newley's presence, his jealous thoughts would have been killed at once; but that never happened; and so as feelings such as his *must* grow or die, they grew week by week stronger and more deep-rooted. In his wrath he turned against her fiercely, making wild and absurd efforts to bring it clearly home to himself that her future was a matter of indifference to him. He talked to others, while he heard every word she said; and he looked at others where it seemed always she whom he saw. And she? She would sometimes watch him among the guests in his own house, excited and restless, yet always in her eyes—as in others', perhaps—outshining all, by reason, not of the charm of face or figure, but of the varied elements in his nature which set him almost as a man apart; and listening to him as he talked to Una, she would try to fancy how it would be if he spoke so to her. Then, sadly remembering their last interview, she would try to fancy how it would be if it were *right* for him to speak so to her.

Thus the summer went on, but the most grievous thing of all was to see that, as Newley increased his expenditure by every justifiable means at Hohye, Rourke increased his at a still more rapid pace at Winter-

field. Again and again would one of his real friends endeavor to arrest him in his random career, but arguments seemed of little use.

"The cases are so different," they would say. "Newley, with more money at his command than he knows what to do with, may safely try his experiments and carry out his whims; but you, with the immeasurably smaller means, leave these far behind, and rush into what shall totally eclipse them. So, having the higher tastes, as well as the lower funds, the expense to you is simply ruinous."

"So are other things," would Rourke say, carelessly; "it will all be the same in a hundred years."

A lie which has been, and will be, the corner-stone of many an edifice of self-destruction.

"You will have to retrench rapidly if you are to keep your head above water much longer, Mr. Trenham," his lawyers would say, in a tone meant to be all-convincing; and Rourke would answer that it was all right; and he *would* retrench—presently. And if, in their anxiety, they could draw him into a serious discussion on the wide line of figures between his income and his outlay, he would lightly, though always courteously, urge the old excuse.

Newley had the estate for life; and if he, Rourke, could not pay his own debts, his sons would do so for him. Even if that thief went on selling the timber through all the time of his occupation, Hohve would still be the most valuable estate in the county, and Winterfield itself by that time would be worth talking of—all thanks be due to Mr. Bartle, as Trenham would add, with the touch of pathos which belonged to him.

So all advice and arguments fell to the ground, not even taking root there, as some will when most neglected, to flourish after the seed is forgotten. It was quite true that the farm was flourishing under the watchful, never-tiring care of Abram Bartle. Never did the old man utter a word of weariness and hopelessness, as he worked and planned at Winterfield during that anxious year; and never did a cloud, save of a moment's width, perhaps,

come between the two who had always been so frank, and gentle, and loving together. Even Athol had never the heart to dissuade the old farmer from his self-imposed task, though he saw that the responsibility and the restlessness told upon him. How could he, when it was so plain to him that this constant intercourse with the pure, simple, healthful mind of his uncle was one of Rourke's surest safeguards now; and that the old man's happiest thought was that he was necessary to his boy? As for doing him good, such a thought was far indeed from Abram in his humility.

"Rourke," he would say sometimes, "you will likely be fond of farming all your life, dear lad; so it is better for you to master it all as soon as you can. To do that now, and have help further on, is better than having a little ready money now, before you're farmer enough to invest it in the very best way; isn't it?"

And Rourke—not in the slightest understanding to what the old man alluded, because he had never thought of him in old times but as a comparatively poor man—would say, without much thought upon the matter, that of course it was far better.

But, as the summer went on, Una grew anxious and ill at ease about her husband's restlessness and extravagance—even she, last of all to see it in her love and trust in him. She had never been accustomed to bear any pain alone, and so she frankly spoke of this one. To Abram Bartle first, whom she, too, had learned unconsciously to lean upon. But he only smiled at her fears, and told her Rourke was very busy just then, but would take a holiday, and be quieter and calmer—when his little one came. Then she spoke of it to Lorraine, who said it was no wonder, and that he would need at least a year to fight with circumstances before he could settle down placidly, a poor man, in the shadow of his old home. Then she spoke of it to her father, who gravely said it grieved him too to see such varied passions let loose in a man like Rourke, by nature so peculiarly alive to all that was both good and beautiful. She even spoke of it to old Mr. Surle, who interrupted her quiet words with his harsh little laugh.

"He has had his time and made nothing of it," he said. "He has been accustomed all his life to everything in the richest abundance. If he suffers a bit now, it is but what many men have to do all their lives. If he's busy, all the better. If he's harassed, it won't last for ever."

It was on the very day that she had received this peculiar consolation from old Digby, that Rourke came unexpectedly into her room, to find her in tears.

"Una, dear, I know that you are lonely here," he said, fondly caressing her. "I have been thinking of it lately, and I want you to ask Miss Shefford to come and stay with you—to live with you here. I think she would like it, because she always loved you so well. I am so much occupied, and so—so changeable, dear, that you ought to have some one else with you; you have not been used to solitude or worry."

"But I have very little solitude," Una said, trying to look bravely through her tears. "You have so many people here, Rourke—I—I wish you had not so many—and I am not worried."

"I cannot bear to see you look pale," he said, with a regretful, almost a remorseful look into her face. "I should be so much happier if I felt that you had some one with you always, who was taking precious care of you—for me; so much happier, dear little wife—especially now."

Una, blushing vividly, whispered that, if Miss Shefford came, Lorraine would be lonely.

"Not she," replied Rourke, scoffingly. "There are plenty of people always hovering about her."

"Rourke, you are so hard upon Lorraine now. Why is it?"

"What is the use of talking of Lorraine for ever?" was the answer, hastily unkind. "Why should she interfere with our happiness—yours as well as mine? Shall I ask Miss Shefford, or will you?"

"Neither," whispered Una, not allowing herself to picture what a comfort it would be for her to have her old friend with her now—"neither, please. I do not want her. I want only you, Rourke."

Then, in a sudden, remorseful gentleness, he kissed her again and again, and said he only needed her.

It was on a calm September morning, a few weeks after this, that Miss Shefford and Lorraine were sent for to see Una and her baby-boy; and what a happy sight this was for the younger sister no one could guess.

It was arranged, at Lorraine's own request, that Miss Shefford should remain at the farm, and Lorraine return alone; but through all the afternoon and evening she lingered, unwilling to leave, and hovering softly about the room where Una lay, or the temporary nursery into which Rourke's dressing-room had been converted. She was lingering here, waiting for the baby to awake, and standing at the window in the soft radiance of a golden harvest sunset, when Athol entered the room.

"O Athol," she said, brightly, "does not Una look wonderfully well—and the boy? I have been wickedly full of fears for a long time, and now it is all so happy. Is not the little one strong and healthy, and is not Una well?"

"Yes. Thank God!" he answered, with as deep a gratitude almost as hers.

"Ah! he is waking. Give him to me before I go, nurse," said Lorraine, holding her arms for the little one, and smiling down into its sleepy face.

Closely and tenderly she held him, her heart throbbing, her eyes bright in their deep gratitude; not even seeing Athol as he lingered beside her; only thrilling in every fibre of her frame to the glad consciousness that she held Una's baby—Rourke's baby; a new, sure, matchless bond between them; a new incentive, deep and strong and tender, for Rourke's better life.

"He, at any rate," said Athol, quietly, as he watched her, "is as surely heir to Holve as if he had been born there. I wonder whether Trenham thinks of this?"

"Yes, I wonder."

But she was not wondering at all. She was only recalling how anxious and tender he had been with Una all that day; and how Una's eyes had always brightened at his coming with a frank confession of how entirely his love made her happiness. And the girl's face bent lower still above the child.

So she was standing, in the calm sunset light when Rourke entered noiselessly from Una's room. There came a sudden deepening of the line between his eyes; a sudden uneasy shiver as if something hurt him; and then he turned and left the room again, without addressing either Athol or Lorraine.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUNNY mild October afternoon, just six weeks later on.

The small but beautifully-kept lawn at Winterfield caught the sunbeams on its many-tinted flowers, but tried in vain to catch the dainty cloud-shadows as they flew softly over its smooth, green turf. And the old house stood basking in the mellow smile of the Autumn's middle age.

Up the gravelled approach drove Lorraine Gaveston in her light, luxurious pony-carriage; hurrying because she wanted to be in time to take her sister for a drive on this sweet, calm afternoon. But she was too late. The servant, who met her at the door, told her that Mrs. Trenham and Miss Shefford, with the nurse and baby, had been out for nearly an hour. The master was at The Narrowway. Might the ponies be taken round?

"Yes," Lorraine said, unhesitatingly. She would not, even on ordinary occasions, have returned without seeing her sister, but now of course she never thought of doing so. This was Una's first drive since her illness; her sister must wait and see how she had borne it; and then—Rourke was away.

"No, thank you, I will not go in," she said, when the servant held the door; "I will stay here."

So, while the ponies were taken round, she sat down on a low garden-seat close to the open hall door, from whence she should be able to see the carriage even before it reached the lawn gates. Sitting so, in the full sunlight, her watching eyes—shaded only by the narrow brim of her hat—grew tired, and she closed them languidly. Just then it seemed that the gates were opened, and the carriage rolled swiftly up to her; but Una was not in it. Lorraine started to her feet, faltering, Where was Una? And

then she awoke, and saw that the opening of the lawn gate had been to admit Rourke.

"I— Do you know I think I had fallen asleep," she said, laughing rather nervously as he came up to her.

"No wonder," he answered, taking the hand she offered. "It is almost as sleepy a day as June could give us."

"I understood you were at The Narro-way?"

"So I have been, but I hastened back. This is Una's first drive, and I wished to meet her on her return. I fancy they will be here soon, though Brent seemed to feel it incumbent on him to drive very slowly. Will you come in?"

"I would rather stay here."

So she sat down again, and he waited near her; while the sunshine folded both of them in its pure, sleepy warmth.

"This is a stranger to me," said Lorraine, touching the sleek dun coat of a greyhound which had followed Rourke, and now stood panting beside him. "I have not seen him before."

"Very probably," Rourke answered, chillily, "as you only come here at most rare intervals."

"But you see how it is, Rourke, don't you?" she explained, gently. "I do not like to be away much, now that papa and I are alone at Rupert's Rest."

"He would not mind. He comes perpetually; so do others—who care for us."

"Papa still sorely misses Una," said Lorraine, determined not to resent his unkind words, and so trying to turn aside the subject. "I feel more and more sure every day that I shall never in any way be able to make up to him for the loss of Una."

"If you had felt this a year ago—" He made a sudden pause. But though by a swift effort he had broken off those words, he did not substitute others, as a woman would have done. He leaned back in his corner of the seat, his eyes following the movement of her hand on the greyhound's neck.

"How I used to long for a dog when I was a little girl!" she said, only for the purpose of breaking the pause.

"Lorraine," he asked presently, when

she thought her unnecessary speech forgotten, "do you remember telling me of Draco? Did you ever grow fonder of him after that time?"

"Never."

"Is he still holding his court at Hampton House?"

"Yes."

"I often think of it; of your life there; of—. What a curious will your aunt seems to have left!" he added, again checking the involuntary words. "Can you understand *why* her property should not be disposed of until Vere is engaged, or—you are?"

He had raised his eyes now, and fixed them, with rather stern intentness, on her face.

"I do not know," she said, her lips twitching a little, "I dare say it will turn out nothing when the trust is opened—if it ever is."

"If!" laughed Rourke, cynically. "Is Athol to work always as he works now, and never earn his reward? Are you to be always sought, and never won?"

A thought, almost a resolution, which had long been hovering shapelessly about Lorraine, came to her then in form distinct. "Athol has always loved me;" this was how it came, while each of her heartbeats was a sob; "he has made me know it all my life. I think I will tell him the whole truth, and he—he will take me away. Rourke loved Una when I was away, dearly and earnestly enough to seek her for his wife. I—will go again."

He was sitting once more in a mute reverie. Even she could see how one thought occupied him constantly, as well through his conversation as in rest; and the deepening line between his eyebrows showed how bitter a thought this was. But it was he who broke the pause this time, the uneasy cynicism still running through his tones.

"It almost seems so; and it is not fair for any girl to be always sought and never won. Yet I'm sure the choice is wide enough and varied. Is it really true that you refused to attend the archery meeting at Hohve yesterday; the last and grandest of the season? Your father tells me New-

ndefatigable in his efforts to get
:"

fatigable!" she answered, her eyes
saucily from under the brim of her
glad she was to leave that other
and tread here, where both were
eir contempt.

s perpetually at Rupert's Rest, I

etually!"

arming fellow."

ming."

there is Sir Peter Vaughan. He
lerful little fellow, and looks, as
said, at least seven years younger
age."

ooks—about—sixteen," pondered
with a quiet drollery in her eyes.
will not that be an immense ad-
o him when he gets on in years?
ld never be distressed by lines and
there. By Jove! what a beauti-
warm——"

ak gently of the young,'" quoted
demurely.

—far removed from either of those

—" began Rourke, but paused

in his speech. This catalogue of

s admirers was not a subject on

could jest as she did. Yet rest-

went on to speak of one more—

ing in Athol's name at last in his

nial tones, as he always did.

ing to Newley's archery meeting

a great mistake of yours," he said

; "I witnessed the departure of

guests. I happened to be at the

when Lucilla went; she was in a

vild excitement, which she felt it

ul duty to conceal because I was

er brother's annoyance, I fear,"

rraine.

what matter? Athol is a bigoted

ad this was to be the grandest

he season. And she had a Lin-

1 dress with white curtains drawn

s. What could mar the enjoy-

ich a costume?"

y trifle," said Lorraine, laughing,

unscientific incision of a hair-pin.

n that succeed in my own experi-

"I should not have fancied it. You al-
ways look so full of enjoyment when I see
you among a lot of other people."

"I wonder that Lucilla visits where
her brother will not," interposed Lorraine,
almost nervously; "I wonder, above all,
that she visits *there*."

"The brother and sister form rather a
strong contrast, don't they?" asked Rourke,
watching her steadily as she spoke. "She
so bent on pleasure (not even, like the
worthy Mr. and Mrs. Gilpin, with a frugal
mind), and he so bent on doing good."

No uttered answer; and more intently
still he tried to read it in her face.

"Was it not Boerhaave who said he
looked on the poor as his best patients, be-
cause God was their paymaster? Vere,
though but a nameless and struggling fel-
low, would be just such a man, I fancy, in
the eyes of such a paymaster. Lorraine,
you surely hold with me there?"

"Indeed I do," she answered; but so
simply that he felt his heart leap in its sel-
fish gladness.

"How was Mr. Bartle to-day?" she
asked, breaking the pause which fell be-
tween them then. "I went yesterday and
had tea with him."

"Yes; he told me. He always enjoys
your visits immensely. Did you think him
well?"

"He said that no one enjoyed life more
than he did; and I remembered how 'Life
is not to live, but to be well,' you know."

"And he would not say anything that
was not true," said Rourke, betraying a lit-
tle of his own anxiety, as something in our
tone generally does when the thought
has no parent but the wish.

"He has a kind of health of spirit, too,"
added Lorraine, "and that helps him
much."

"He has, as he says, always been a
healthy man. His maxim has been Sir
Philip Sidney's,

"Great temp'rance, open air,
Easy labor, little care."

"I wish it were so still," mused the
young man, a look of troubled doubt upon
his face; "I wish I felt it was easy labor
while he is working for me; I wish I felt it
was little care, while he is caring for me;

I have let him care for me, till I can see his heart breaking over my wasted life. Yet God knows I would give him ease and pleasure if I could. To please him—only to please him—I try to learn to do well the things I hate to do at all; I try to master thoroughly what it maddens me even casually to think upon. I work for my own good, *only* because he—in his simple kindness—always seeks my good. What use is my life to me, though, when I can tell of no motive but that?"

"Wait; others may come, perhaps," said Lorraine, dubiously, wishing any words of hers could calm the passion in his voice.

"Yes, wait," he cried ironically; "and, while I wait, dream of glorious things a man may achieve and acquire without money or time, only by waiting. Bah! that's woman's work. As if a man, with every passion alive and fierce within him, and every muscle strong for action, could—could lie down under the feet of idiots and *wait*."

"I would a great deal rather have too little both of time and money than too much," said the girl, softly, in her distress at seeing the restless light in his eyes. "They are both heavy burdens, when one has more than one knows what to do with. I am never so happy as when I have what looks like too much to do."

He glanced with quick inquiry into her face. Could it be possible that only at times was *she* happy, either? She, in her peerless beauty and richly-dowered youth!

"Look! there they come."

She had been first, after all, to see the slowly-advancing carriage, but Rourke himself had opened the gate in time.

Brent, touching his hat, drove on to the door without stopping; while Una, pale and tired though she seemed, could still brightly smile and nod at Rourke, in her gladness at seeing him there.

"And Lorraine too!" she exclaimed, as Rourke lifted her tenderly from the carriage. "What a nice surprise, dear! Look, the air has given baby such a pretty color."

Lorraine greeted Miss Shefford, then gazed long at the little fellow, but she did not attempt to take him from his nurse.

On her husband's arm Una entered the old-fashioned but elegantly furnished room, where the merry party had met that evening, nearly a year ago, to welcome Rourke on his first arrival at Winterfield. Here she rested on a couch, while Rourke brought her the tea which Miss Shefford prepared, and while Lorraine, with her own cup in her hand, hovered about her. And they seemed as happily united, and as light-hearted a group as ever the sun's rays could have touched, gliding in through those low, narrow windows.

"Sleepy, Una?" asked Rourke, seeing that her eyelids drooped languidly, even while she was smiling at a speech of his.

"Yes, ridiculously sleepy," she said, sitting up and trying to rouse herself. "I feel as if it ought to be eleven o'clock instead of five."

"We will fancy it eleven," he said, with great gentleness, "and bed-time. Come; may I carry you?"

She laughed and tried to shake off the heavy sleepiness which seemed to have assailed her; but she was soon glad to accept his support, and own that she would rather go to bed.

Sitting with her upstairs, Lorraine seemed glad now to take the baby into her own arms. Una for a few moments had talked of it proudly, calling her sister's attention to its likeness to its father, then she had fallen asleep. But Lorraine still sat with the little one in her arms, wondering how any one could see a likeness between that baby-face and Rourke's.

Una had been sleeping calmly for an hour, when her sister rose to leave the room.

"I must not be away at papa's dinner-time," she said to herself, "or I would stay till Una awakes. She has not lost her delicate look, but then this very afternoon she told us all that she felt stronger than usual—and happier. Ah! yes, she is so happy in her husband's love—as she will be to the end." So the girl thought, with a thought that was half a prayer, as she bent to kiss the pretty, sleeping face.

"This drowsiness is the effect of the drive. I fancy. The sleep will do her great good."

With these words of Miss Shefford's in her

Lorraine drove away; glad at heart thought of Una, and laughing at herself, as she recalled that moment of the carriage returning with-

"I will not disturb Una," Rourke said as he went upstairs that night. "It is good for her."

"Right sight, just then, of the baby lying at his dressing-room fire, and he did not speak to the nurse."

"I do not go to your mistress until you give me Miss Shefford's permission. You have no business to have you?"

"Yes, sir," the woman answered, "I am rather proudly how entirely indebted to the child was, and had always been to his delicate mother."

"I will, don't forget, please. Good night."

The morning Miss Shefford told him that she had had a very quiet night, but yet it was better than to disturb her, as the sleep would probably do so much good.

Trenham said, "Quite right. If I could be before she wakes, Miss Shefford, tell her I shall be home as early as I can, so that I have business in Atton, and will take me most of the day?"

On his return he was told that his wife was well; and now the tidings seemed to him—just a little.

"Is it well?" he asked Miss Shefford. The old lady said she could not understand it, but she supposed it

"I will sit with her to-night," he said, "because it is hardly probable that I shall sleep till morning, and I shall like to be near her. And indeed, Miss Shefford, you need a night of undisturbed

rest. At last, through the night beside his wife, painfully awake himself, and listening to every low-drawn breath of hers when he heard the household stirring, opening the shutters—found the light broad and brightly on Una's face, he felt himself growing sick and foreboding. Going softly down stairs he summoned Brent and sent him to the carriage with a note for Dr. Vere.

"I fancy Lorraine will be here, presently," Mr. Trenham said Miss Shefford, meeting Rourke just then upon the stairs—for she, in her anxiety, had risen even before the dawn. "She sent Joan with a note of inquiry yesterday, and said they had guests at Rupert's Rest for the whole day, but that she would come as early as she could this morning."

"Hardly yet," Rourke said; "it is too early."

But he was wrong; for Lorraine and her father drove over, even before the October day had fairly settled on the farm. Still Una had not awakened, and Athol had not yet come.

Rourke was sitting in his wife's room, when Lorraine entered it. With only a smile for him, she passed on to the head of the bed, and stood there watching the sweet, sleeping face.

"Oh! Rourke, when will Athol come?"

"Soon, I trust; but why are you anxious for him?"

"Because I want you to awake Una, and you say you will not until Athol comes."

"No; I—I do not know which is best."

She looked up quickly into his harassed face. "Are you afraid?" she faltered, her brows drawn, and her eyes dark and miserable.

"Yes—I am afraid," he answered, his voice very low and stiff; "I wish to God that Athol would come!"

A long waiting, while they two stood beside the bed, and Miss Shefford sat crying—without exactly knowing why—at a distant window. A long, long waiting, as it seemed, and then the door was opened for Athol and Mr. Gaveston.

"I was out when your servant came, Trenham," said Dr. Vere, as, after his greeting to all, he, too, came and stood beside the bed. "I came the instant I received your note. Trenham, you must awake her."

"It looks a pleasant, refreshing sleep, will it be best to disturb it?" asked Mr. Gaveston, anxiously.

For a moment Athol could not answer. One thought was troubling him beyond all words; why had not this been done yesterday morning? why had he not been sent

for yesterday; or why had he not chanced to come? It might have made no difference; but who could ever now be able to tell?

"What do you think?" asked Mr. Gaveston, again.

"Yes; awake her, Trenham."

Lorraine, with her hands locked upon the coverlet, stood watching and waiting. She heard Rourke whispering to his wife; trying to rouse her by the old pet names which he knew she had loved—names which belonged to the early days of their love. She saw him take her hands, and kiss her again and again. Then she heard a cry of pain; and—following that—a low and yearning call.

"Rourke! Rourke!"

That was all; but Una had known him at the last moment, and her dying smile had been for him.

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE than a year had passed since Una Trenham's death, and matters seemed to have reached a crisis now, in that impotent rivalry between the masters of Hohve and Winterfield. The death of one of the members for the county happened in that hard winter of 1870-71, and the young men were to contest the seat. This step, and its possible success, had been for years before the eyes of Horton Newley; and, except one at present unsatisfied desire, his seat in Parliament was the only thing needed to overflow his cup of perfect triumph. With Rourke Trenham a widely different motive worked. Three years before he would have laughed at the idea of *contesting* a seat—proud in his confidence of a Trenham's certainty of being returned, if he chose to offer himself as a candidate for the membership. Eighteen months ago he would have ridiculed the idea of entering upon a contested election with no balance at his bankers. But now it was all different.

One certain bill, so often vainly brought before the Senate, would be debated during the next Session; and Rourke would—he said to himself—be in Parliament then. If he spent his last shilling he would be there to speak in favor of that bill.

To onlookers, the chances, both for an against the two candidates, appeared very nearly equal.

In Trenham's favor were urged his nam and ancestry, and a certain influence over the people which he was known to possess though he rarely chose to exert it. In Newley's favor were urged his wealth and present high position; his bland and successful efforts to make himself agreeable to everyone, and those staunchly Conservative principles which the shire loved.

In Trenham's disfavor were his indifference to public favor and his incapacity for dispensing unlimited hospitality at Winterfield, and his daringly Radical notions on many subjects. In Newley's disfavor were urged the foginess of his birth and descent, and the prejudice entertained against him by many of the old gentry.

The Atton men rose in a body, and enjoyed the demonstrations which are dear to Englishmen in general under such circumstances. The county was stirred from end to end by every feeling which could range from amusement to keen anxiety, and from intemperate levity to stern political ardor.

Messrs. Marshall & Sullivan worked well and indefatigably; while Newley's agents, with unlimited funds at their disposal, and unlimited craft upon their lips, followed undermining on their track.

Newley addressed his constituents every evening in an elaborate, flattering speech, which he delivered with urbanity, and for which he was rewarded by hundreds of handshakes and waving handkerchiefs.

Trenham—never able to prepare a speech of any kind—would rise in his place when he was bidden, and first astonish himself by what he said; then be equally astonished by the reception of his words. Though in reality more full of thought than promise, these words were, in their nervous vigor so thoroughly born of a deep earnestness in his own heart, that they could not help answering to the earnestness of every heart about him. And the Atton men clustered about their candidate with vociferous homage, and echoed his pleasant, high-breton tones with clamorous cheers. And Rourke was always at their call. At the most ur

likely times, and in the most unlikely places, he would stand up and address them in that straightforward English way of his which his listeners called "speaking home;" his handsome face now irresistible in its drollery, and now stirred to the deepest earnestness.

Then he would join his friends, with the brilliant excitement still in his eyes, and merrily entertain at the farm all who chose to escort him home. But never—either in the crowd, or left with one companion—would he discuss the possibility of Newley's success.

Up to the night of the election the chances seemed as equal as they had seemed all through the canvassing. That night Dr. Vere spent at Winterfield; his kind heart telling him that Rourke would feel it a relief to have an old friend with him to whom he could talk of what was uppermost in his mind; and guessing that Abram Bartle would be too painfully anxious himself to spend that evening alone with Rourke. In both surmises Athol was right.

Late into the night, the two friends sat; first telling each other comical little narratives of the canvassing; then recalling other elections within their memories; and at last drifting into that subtle vein of confidence which is so much easier to trace by night than by day, and which can never be so traced by more than two.

"Vere," said Rourke, presently, without any introduction, his tone low, and his eyes upon the fire, "that bill *must* pass this session."

A pause, unbroken by any answer from Athol.

"What do you say?" inquired Trenham, impatiently.

"I think it will not," was the quiet reply, weighted by a full comprehension.

"You *hope* not; and so do not answer fairly," exclaimed Rourke, with testy eagerness. "I wonder at such a narrow notion from you, Vere—a large-hearted, generous fellow like you."

"Such an insignificant one," rejoined Athol, smiling, "that my notions, either way, will not make a feather's weight of difference."

"And you seem actually glad to say it," returned Rourke, guessing nothing of how his friend hid his own feelings in the effort to soothe and quiet him. "Why, Vere, if I felt myself a cipher, incapable of helping the thing on, I believe my brain would burst."

"It will make a great personal difference to you," said Athol, so quietly that Rourke's eyes filled with a wondering admiration.

"Athol, how can you speak so kindly to me in my selfishness?" he said. "What an uncommon love yours is! It must be what Hazlitt calls the Religion of Love. I cannot understand it, Athol," he went on, leaning forward in his seat, and gazing at his friend with a restless eagerness in his eyes; "do you *know*—do you understand—how I am laboring with every power I possess to undermine your life-long hope?"

"Look at it differently," said Vere, in his kindest tones. "We have both—without any will or premeditation in the matter—given our love to Lorraine Gaveston. We both dream—perhaps madly, as you said to-night—of a possible future when we may call her wife. We neither of us could prevent this love growing in our hearts, so how can we blame each other? If she chooses you, Rourke, I shall know that she never would have been quite happy with me. If I were to win her, I suppose you would feel the same."

"Never; I should—but it is best not to think what I might do; I should be a selfish coward, any way. Athol, old fellow, I often wonder how you can bear to have me near you—knowing how I try, with every power God has given me, to win the girl you love, and have loved for so many years. Ah! I remember it; the story you told me on that evening I returned to England—before I saw her. Our words often and often come back to me now. I was *glad* you loved her then; I said it would seem as if you married my own sister. Sometimes, Vere, I try to go back and feel so again; but I never can—so far back, and now so impossible, it seems!"

"Vere, why don't you answer?" he added, after his pause of restless silence. "No words you could utter would be so full

been accepted. What made you start? Was it a remembrance of my poverty? What does that matter? If the cause is won I shall not mind my poverty: if it is not—if it is not," he repeated, with a moody laugh, "let the money go with everything else."

"Rourke, dear fellow, why should that ever be the case?"

"Because it must—a dainty, womanish reason, eh? I've sold my hunters, Vere."

"Was that necessary?" asked Athol, starting again at the abrupt intelligence.

"Necessary, if only to tide over this month," laughed Rourke, uneasily. "There are some fellows who make very objectionable creditors. Vere, who is it writes so jauntily that creditors are a superstitious sect and great observers of set days and times! Ha, ha! I dare say he never knew what it was to be of an opposite sect, with their grip upon one's collar. I hope he didn't."

While the minute hand crept half round the dial of the timepiece before them the two young men sat in silence; then Rourke asked a question which he had evidently been schooling himself to ask in his usual tones.

"I have bothered you to death, I know, Athol, and what have we proved?"

"Just what we had no need to prove at all," said Dr. Vere, with his pleasant smile, "that however we may think differently on one point we are true friends always."

"True friends always," repeated Trenham; "and let us promise that whether—I mean, in any case, nothing shall break that friendship. Athol, old fellow," he added, a little brokenly, "you will never take that from me as all—good things—have been taken."

"Our friendship can never end but with death—if then," said Athol, with steady earnestness.

"Thank you. Now shall we go?"

At breakfast time next morning Winterfield was crowded with Trenham's constituents, and the meal was taken in a great clamor and excitement.

Many times did Dr. Vere glance in won-

der at his friend, who seemed so light-hearted and so confident of success.

"I must go now," said Athol, speaking low to him before the breakfast was over; "I ought to be at the Infirmary this moment. I shall soon see you in town."

"Very soon. Don't desert me to-day."

Athol laughed. "My only fear is that I shall haunt the poll like a lunatic," he said.

And he did; for between the visits he had to pay he always found himself riding rapidly back to Atton, hovering about the long, wooden booth where Trenham's name stood; and stopping eagerly and proudly before the polling list.

At three o'clock he was obliged to attend an operation at the Infirmary, and then the names stood as they had stood all the morning, only the numbers had been altered.

Trenham	-	-	1,071
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Newley	-	-	1,048
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"How are the votes?" asked a medical student of him, as he entered the hospital.

"A majority of twenty-three for Trenham."

"That's right. What a ferment the town is in! They say Trenham has just walked across the square with an old woman's arm round his neck."

"True enough," laughed Dr. Vere.

"All the country seems to be in to-day, except Miss Gaveston. What a shame it is! Her sister's husband standing for the county, and she not paying him the compliment of coming in to see the election. I suppose, being so pretty, she thinks she may be whimsical."

Athol passed on without answering. Only he could understand the feeling which kept Lorraine at home, and the painful anxiety which was making this day seem like a year to her.

Four o'clock, and the poll closed.

Newley	-	-	1,211
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Trenham	-	-	1,208
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Rolling along the crowded streets in his great luxurious carriage, blue ribbons flying from the heads of his four grey horses, blue ribbons flying from the dresses of the ladies who sat with him—went Horton Newley, M. P., bowing bareheaded to the obsequious crowd.

he hotel door, waiting while Brent t round his dog-cart, the defeated ate stood in the midst of another listening with lazy indifference to fting of the opposition beyond, and ledging, with quiet courtesy, the hy of his friends, his eyes clear and king, his tones even more leisurely eir wont.

1 Brent at last drove the bays up 1 the crowd, Trenham stood aside Mr. Gaveston took his place in the t; then slowly followed him, laugh- he very last moment with the gen- who stood around. Raising his 1, with cool, deliberate courtesy, he e reins from his servant, and easily fully guided his horses through the

—sitting behind with folded arms, white with rage—tried in vain to master's expression; to Mr. Gaveston was equally a riddle. To all ap- e, Rourke was unmoved by his

Now and then pleasantly answer- lute which met him, and now and iling in cool contempt, from his it, as a jeer rose to greet him, Tren- ve on through the crowd, and talk- even jested with his companion.

when the long day was over, was left alone at the farm, he sat the whole night upon his solitary his head lying heavily back in his hands, and his face like the face of nitten down upon the battle-field und which he knows to be mortal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LA was still away from home when e returned to The Cottage, after when Rourke Trenham, and when ed she was in a state of irrepressi- ement; her wrath against the elec- body making her eyes flash, and ks burn until Nature asserted her- ough Art. But next morning some emory held sway, and gave her a suppressed delight, which Athol much engrossed to detect. illa, would you mind putting a few

stitches in my glove?" he asked, heart- weary of the subject of the previous day's excitement. "I was ashamed of it yester- day morning, but you were not up when I left."

"Put on another pair," proposed Lucilla, carelessly.

"The others want mending even more than these do. You promised to do them, but forgot, I suppose."

"You should buy yourself more; you are dreadfully stingy, Athol, and there's no cause to be so now."

"I think there is more cause than ever now," he said, without resenting the words. "Shall I tell you why?"

"If you like, for I have news good enough to counteract yours, whatever it may be."

"About twelve months before my father's death, Lucilla, he borrowed one hundred pounds, which, by his private memoranda, I fancy was paid in the following month. The creditor was an old friend of his, so he would not ask for receipt of payment. That friend died, and his executors came upon me for the one hundred pounds, because they found the acknowledgment of the loan in my father's handwriting, and I had no other receipt to show."

"Of course you didn't pay," struck in Lucilla, in her impetuous ignorance. "It is too long ago for the law to make you."

"Still I felt obliged to pay. It was impossible for me to do it then, so I gave a note of hand promising to pay within five years. I hoped I should be a prosperous man then. Now the debt is due, and I want to pay it this month. It will be a great strain upon us, dear, for a time, and so—and so I want you to mend my gloves."

"But—wait a minute," said Lucilla, coming up to her brother, and putting a hand on each of his shoulders, "I have news to tell you, and slightly different from your lugubrious tidings. Look here, Athol; what do you thing old Digby Surle—I mean my godfather, let me mention him now with all respect—has done for me? He has made his will in *my* favor entirely. Yes, you may well start; and—I have it here."

"Lucilla—nonsense!"

"I have it; I am going to show it to you."

When, a few minutes afterwards, she put the sealed packet into his hands, he looked at it as if without any comprehension in his gaze.

"Have you read it?" he asked at last.

"Of course not. Why should I read it, when he told me what it was?"

"What did he say?"

"He said *this*," she answered, with slow, unctuous emphasis: "that his memory began to fail him a little, so he didn't care to trust it even so far as keeping charge of his will; and, as I was the only person it concerned, I had better have it to look after. I was to take care of it, and when he died, I was to let everybody settle in their own minds that he had died without a will. But afterwards I was to open this in the presence of yourself and the Gavestons, and—Rourke; because" (one speech of old Digby's, Lucilla thought it as well to suppress here—"You are very fond of Howard Gaveston, aren't ye? Well, let him see your triumph, then") "by then, he, Rourke, would be considered his heir. He said all this yesterday, while I was with him at The Priory, Athol."

"I do not believe in it," said Athol; "and, if I did, I would not like to take the right of another, if I were you."

"He said Rourke was galloping headlong to the —."

"How could you listen!" exclaimed Dr. Vere, angrily.

"He made me listen," sighed Lucilla; "and—and you are not a bit pleased, or much obliged to me, after all."

"Even if that packet is to make you rich eventually, Lucilla, it brings no benefit to you now, you know."

"Oh! doesn't it?" was the laughing answer. "You will see!"

"My dear," urged Athol, with grave earnestness, "don't let me see you trade upon it. As I have told you often before, such a course would only tempt you insidiously into some irremediable error, or even perhaps disgrace. Lucilla, my dear, be warned of this in time."

"What a lecture!" she laughed, jauntily. "Well, at any rate, Athol, you see

how silly it is for you to harass yourself about that paltry hundred pounds."

"Besides that," he said, gravely, "Newley has told me that he did not care for me to occupy this cottage beyond the present term. He seems to have wanted to turn me out for some time; but yesterday, when I took up so many voters for Trenham, I knew that the die was cast. I—oh! how I wish he had not had that power in his hands!"

"It won't matter presently," said Miss Vere, in her easy selfishness; "but I hope he won't turn us out before Mr. Surle's death. Athol, I think a London house would be best for us—don't you? You can get an extensive aristocratic practice, and we can live in style."

"I shall not depend upon that will, Lucilla," said Athol, gravely. "If it is what you think, I call it an act of injustice, all the more glaring considering Rourke's present position. But I fancy it is *not* what you think."

"What a canny fellow you are, Athol," laughed his sister; "you will not enjoy anything beforehand. Well, I must enjoy doubly myself. Now then, if I must wear that stupid glove of yours, let me do it."

As she sewed, Athol sat beside her at the fire, his face full of harassed thought, while he urged her not to depend upon any advantage to herself from the opening of the packet she held, nor to expect it to relieve them of their difficulties.

"If it is so, it will be time to know after Mr. Surle's death," he said.

"But I would rather know it now," answered, lightly. "Do you think I grow younger every day, and more adapted for enjoying life—eh, Athol? That don't be so prim. Here's your glove. Are you going off at once?"

He was drawing on the glove, when he stopped with an exclamation, "Why, Lucilla, you have made a great bunch at the end of the finger. I cannot wear this. Will you undo it?"

"I dare say," retorted Lucilla, rising with a yawn. "It will serve my purpose all the better by obliging you to buy another pair. You shouldn't be so niggard, Athol."

ould do it better even myself."

y," she answered, gaily, as she left m.

n she entered it again she was seized a uncontrollable fit of laughter, for was standing sewing at the window, ws knit, and his consciousness of all l matters lost in his breathless appli- o this unconquerable task.

pital!" cried Lucilla, standing on to deposit a quick kiss on his puck- outh. "Give it to me now. You ok very much at home in the sew- artment, and Mr. Bartle is waiting." alled to ask you to step in at Winter- octor," said Abram, as Lucilla left m, and Athol met him with out- d hand. "Rourke goes to London

London!—why?"

ardly know, but perhaps it is better should go away for a bit. I'm glad I'm glad," repeated the old man, effort; "though every moment I inger for his voice. Yes, I'm glad," d, brokenly; "for what can I say now? What words of comfort can im that are not worn out or mean- ? When I speak to him I feel as if I t reach him, because he has every- o bear, and I nothing. Yet, in my art, it is as bad for me."

s, I understand," said Dr. Vere, qui-

ctor, I know what is fretting and ig him now; and I am more fearful alm to-day than I was of his excite- esterday. You will call on your o Kumley?"

ill come with you now. Why should ride together?"

ey did, but when they reached Win- they found that Rourke had driven ton half an hour before to catch the . express.

ig Rourke's absence Abram Bartle managed the two farms; watchful, s, untiring, and looking and long- ays for his boy's return; while Lor- aveston did her brightest and best r his loneliness and lighten his anx- o one guessing what *she* bore and

At The Cottage Athol worked on, bear- ing almost the same weight as Rourke had to bear, and proving how some natures can endure in patient secrecy a yoke against which others chafe themselves to death. And his sister, strong in the possession of that document which was, to her, the ear- nest of future wealth, blindly and selfishly pursued her chimeras, and heeded neither her brother's remonstrances nor her own possible confusion at last.

It was a terrible winter for the poor, that of 1870-71, and Athol found work to fill not only every hour of his day, but many of his nights too. Even among the rich there were many to whom it proved fatal; and one of these was Mr. Digby Surle, of Kumley Priory. He set out one bitter af- ternoon to walk to two outlying cottages, from which the rents had not yet been re- ceived (an errand he rather enjoyed than otherwise), and when he had pocketed, from both, the few shillings stowed away for coal, and had threatened speedy ejection if such a delay ever occurred again, he started to walk briskly home. But the turnpike road was more like glass than re- spectable macadam, and Digby found it very difficult to keep his heels in any de- gree of subjection under him.

"I don't know which is the most slip- pery," he muttered to himself, in the midst of a self-congratulatory chuckle, "this road or those confounded tenants yonder. It was well I came myself. Bailiffs never manage as one does oneself. I daresay if Evans had gone, and they had told him that croaking tale about their not being able to live this weather without coal, he would never have thought of telling them that they could have the coal if they set their hearts on it, but that they must make their fires out of doors. The best way to deal with these people is—"

Society will never benefit by that idea. Lightly rose the toes of Mr. Digby Surle in the air before him, and sharply came his wiry form in contact with the highly pol- ished surface of the road.

Mr. Spencer, also on his way from those two cottages, where he had been leaving coal-tickets, came up in time to assist the old gentleman to his feet, and, with great

difficulty, in consequence of the rector's exceedingly diminutive stature, to afford him the support he needed to get him home. That night, when a servant took Mr. Surle his solitary cup of coffee into the dining-room, he found him unconscious in his easy-chair, the wine and dessert untouched before him. In the panic which always strikes a household of servants when their bachelor master is taken ill, Dr. Vere was sent for; and whether the fact, or only the form of the message was alarming, Lucilla did not wait to think; without one moment's hesitation she repaired to The Priory and installed herself devoted nurse. Digby was by no means a gentle or submissive patient, but still he liked her prompt attention. Lucilla was neither an experienced nurse, nor possessed of that inherent skill which love can give (and on the worst night of all she even had recourse to the surreptitious application of mustard to her chest to prevent being caught sleeping at her post); but still she was indefatigable, and her shortcomings were not to be wondered at in one so unaccustomed to exercise herself in any act of self-denial.

Only two weeks of nursing on her part, of untiring attendance on Athol's; of fretting and of rambling on the patient's, then—while Mr. Spencer went solemnly through the last ritual beside the bed—Digby Surle answered to a roll-call which was for his ears alone, and went to give account of his stewardship.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FIERCE storm was raging in the winter darkness. The rain, falling as if in solid sheets of water, would now and then cease suddenly, as if its strength were exhausted, but only to begin again presently with renewed force. The wind held its course with a resistless majesty over the sodden land, bending the supple poplars in a line (exacting thus their homage to its strength and power); crushing the branches of the great limes at Hohve and strewing them in the deserted avenues; breaking off, as if it had been a sapless bough, one noble fir which had been growing grandly there up-

on the height for more than fifty years: then rushing on triumphantly with its weird, threatening cry. Within the cottages the people crowded around their fires, shuddering when the blasts shook the casements and whirled in beneath the doors, in daring menace of what they could do if they chose.

In the fitful glimpses of light which the moon gave when the dusky clouds were driven, a moment at a time, from its chill, misty face, could be seen one figure on the long stretch of turnpike road which glistened, white and wet, in a straight line between Kumley Station and Hohve. One figure only, for all who could be in their warm rooms to-night were glad to close the shutters on the scene and sounds without. A man's figure; his waterproof buttoned across his chest, his hat pulled over his rain-blurred eyes, his head bent against the opposing wind, and his steps dragging wearily—for Dr. Vere was weary to-night, both in body and spirit. Heavily his feet trod the tedious, wet road; heavily his heart lay within him. And who does not know the weight of that utter heart-depression we feel when, though they may have been small troubles which caused it, they have gathered so thickly that it seems impossible to see a light beyond?

A motherless child, on whom, only yesterday, he had performed a successful operation, had been allowed to die in the night through neglect of his instructions; and this was a real grief to him, independent of the sore consciousness of how it would hurt his reputation when the *fact* would be repeated again and again, the *explanation* perhaps never. Then that one hundred pounds must be paid now within three days, and Lucilla's debts he knew to be gathering and increasing with insidious rapidity. Behind these troubles loomed the darker, heavier one of their having soon to quit both the old cottage home which he so dearly loved, and the friends who made his world. And—beyond that one always constant pain which his love now gave him—he had just before seen Lorraine looking ill and unutterably sad, and she had been frank and sisterly to him even more than usual, and so had seemed, in

her gentleness, to widen the wide track he ever saw between them; sometimes brightened a little by the glimmering of his faint though deathless hope, sometimes lying wider and barer than need be, as he saw it now.

Athol had been from home all day, and had taken nothing but a few sandwiches; so now he was feeling, too, the utter exhaustion consequent on the work and abstinence. Further still he had to fight his way against the furious gale, while the heavy branches fell both before and behind yet never touched him; and a thanksgiving unconsciously passed his white lips when he opened the cottage gate, and felt himself at home at last. Home! How long could he call it home?

"O Athol," cried his sister, with an unwonted eagerness in her welcome, "I am so glad you are come at last! I have been—frightened."

"Frightened, dear, in this sheltered little nook?"

"Yes, even here. It sounds as if there were a hundred ghosts gliding and moaning through the house, and I would not be at The Priory to-night for anything. Aren't you glad we didn't stay till to-morrow with the other people? Mr. Gaveston is there, I fear; and Lorraine is alone with only the servants at Rupert's Rest. Athol, what is the matter?"

For they had entered the lighted room, and now that his hat was removed Lucilla could see the ghastly pallor of his face, and a something about him of terrible suffering.

"Athol, you are fretting over those ridiculous debts and things. Why, you absurd boy, what need is there? Sit down, and in one moment I will end it all."

He sat down, hardly comprehending what she said, only trying to bring back life and warmth to his stiff perishing fingers. When she came back she stooped down before him, and, laughing up into his face, held before his eyes the sealed packet which had been given her by Digby Surle.

"Look at it, Athol; doesn't this cheer you? Only to-morrow, you know, and it will be opened, and we shall be rich; and

no more stupid worries. Look! feast your eyes upon it."

"No—take it away."

His voice was weak in all its steadiness, nor could he help the sudden throbbing of his pulses, or the sudden lightening of the heaviness which had been upon him all that day.

"I know it does you good; why, of course it would," laughed Lucilla, setting up the packet before him on the chimney-piece. "Now we will have supper. O Athol, you don't know what plans I've been making about that money. I should have found this awful evening unbearable but for that. We'll have a beautiful house in London, and you shall go out to your patients in a brougham with our crest on it, and a pair of splendid fat horses; and I will dress as well as any lady in London, and we will neither of us so much as remember any of these nasty grumbling Atton and Kumley people. In only a few hours we shall be able to hold our heads above them all. And Athol," she cried, kissing his chill, pale face with sudden impetuosity, "then I'll let you marry as you like."

"Never mind talking of our separation, dear," said Athol, as if the subject pained him beyond words; "and I don't want supper, Lucy."

"Nonsense, you will want it presently. I'll cure you first with a splendid decoction. Oh! but stay," pondered Lucilla, disconsolate just for one second's space, "I haven't the materials in the house, now I come to think. Never mind, I'll get you something else."

It was such a pleasure to the loving, jaded fellow, to see his sister in this unusual mood of willing helpfulness, that, as he told her, it was cordial enough. Sitting still before the fire while she took her supper, his eyes would stray sometimes to that packet perched upon the chimney-piece; not gratefully, not even with the faintest pleasure, yet conscious of a feeling unlike any which had visited him before, through that most wearisome day.

Poor Athol! He had always so firmly rejected any thought or even remembrance of this will which Digby Surle had given

into his sister's keeping; so often prayed that it might not be to either of them a temptation to dishonor. And now—and now, though his eyes turned from it in haste, he knew it was not *pain* which made his heart beat and his pulses throb.

"Go to bed early, won't you, Athol? because you've had such a hard and worrying day."

Lucilla's two smart maids had left the room after prayers had been read, and Athol was sitting still where he had read them, when his sister said this, lazily lighting her candle.

"Yes; and if I am gone out in the morning before you come down, don't let it make any difference, Lucy. You go to The Priory, as arranged."

In the act of blowing out her spill, she looked at him astonished.

"What do you mean, Athol? Do you forget the funeral is to be to-morrow?"

"No; I shall go. I shall meet you there if—if I am not in time to go with you."

"Oh! I see. Try to be in time to go with me. Good night."

Either in his long reverie before the fire, or while he had reverently read the words to which his hearers listened unconcernedly, Athol had made one firm determination. Rourke Trenham should not undergo another such pang of mortification as he had undergone at the reading of his step-mother's will. He was to return for his uncle's funeral. He should not do so in ignorance of the truth; he should know it all, and then decide to go or stay away as he thought best.

So next morning Dr. Vere took a ticket to a station about twenty miles on the London line, and there waited for the train which would, as he knew, bring Rourke.

Trenham's surprise and delight at seeing him, though bright and unfeigned, could not hide from Athol how worn and harassed he looked at fitful moments. He had been alone in his compartment when Athol entered, so they were able to talk unrestrainedly. Often in his profession had it devolved upon Dr. Vere to break sad news to those to whom it must be saddest; but never once, he thought, could the task have been so painful to him as this must

be. As a physician, he could sometimes soften his bitter verdict; but it seemed a mockery to pave the way to tidings such as he had to tell now to this friend who had rejoiced to see him; tidings of another wrong and injury, and one by which *he* was to benefit. Almost anything, he felt, must be easier to tell than this. Men rarely break tidings as women do, creeping round the mountain by a winding path, in which the incline is scarcely perceptible; and Athol, like other men, went straight ahead to the top; only planting his foot firmly and keeping his breath equal, to show the ascent was not painful to himself; and showing, as simply as a child by this very effort, how painful he knew it to be for his companion.

But Athol need not have regretted his inability to follow the graduated path. In either case Rourke would have felt the same when he arrived at the intelligence. For a few moments he kept silence when his friend had told all there was to tell, then he laughed.

"I might have guessed," he said, "only I suppose I never thought about it. Why, Athol, dear fellow, I'm glad; I believe this is the most sensible thing my uncle ever did. I wonder at it from him, that's all, for he was as mad as a March hare. Not that his hatred and distrust of me are supposed to prove that, so much as the opposite," added Trenham, in his easy sarcasm; "but it is an acknowledged fact—unless you say it is more sin than insanity, as Uncle Bartle does when I talk to him of insanity in our family. Yes, I'm very glad, Vere; you will make good use of the property if anyone in the world could. Shake hands, old fellow; no one can congratulate you more heartily than I do—and you know *my* news, Athol; you saw it yesterday. The bill was carried on the 15th, by 125 to 84. I have no fear now."

From that time until the funeral of old Digby Surle was over, Rourke made a point of showing to Dr. Vere and his sister, by every method in his power, his hearty, unfeigned gladness at their good fortune. Even Lorraine could not detect a shade of regret in his manner. Athol never caught

his eyes but they were brimful of a happy kind of secret understanding; and with Lucilla he enjoyed many a gay and complimentary aside. Yet, through all, it was plain to Dr. Vere that one thought still pressed upon Trenham's mind; one ever-present haunting thought, and he understood it fully.

The lawyer, an Atton practitioner whom Digby had always employed because he was low in his terms, and a little so in his principles, was the last of the invited guests to leave The Priory. It was with a thoroughly puzzled air that he came forward to take his leave.

It is the most curious circumstance," he said, softly rubbing his smooth hands together, as he finished a thought aloud. "I certainly executed a will for the late Mr. Surle, and never *heard* of his destroying it."

"He was a most remarkable man, sir," quoted Rourke, drily.

"It was in the favor of——"

"Of Miss Vere, I dare say," put in Mr. Gaveston, seeing that the lawyer burned to let out this professional secret, and seeing how uncomfortable the surmises made Athol. "Old Surle was fonder of her than of his heir-presumptive."

"Slightly," assented Rourke with a smile for Lucilla.

"If this should by any means chance to turn up, you will perhaps let me know, Mr. Trenham?" inquired the lawyer uncomfortably expectant of being laughed at.

"Ask Miss Vere. I shall have no power then."

"You naturally look upon it as a joke, sir," said the man of law with a long inquisitive stare into Rourke's face; of which the young man was unconscious, because his eyes were fixed upon Lorraine with their old quiet steadfastness; "but I assure you of the fact. Mr. Surle *did* execute a will while in sound mind six months ago and it was in favor of—well, yes, in favor of Miss Vere. It may possibly be in existence yet, though it is not at all improbable that Mr. Surle thought better of it.

"Worse of it you mean," corrected Rourke lightly, as he conducted the lawyer to the door.

"How easily that young Trenham seems to take things!" muttered the solicitor to himself as he drove away. "He doesn't seem to care a bit for this windfall. Well, it is odd about that will. We searched well; and yet I cannot believe the old man destroyed it. No one was about him who would have any interest in putting that will out of the way, and every place was found locked and untouched; yet—I cannot make it out."

When Rourke re-entered the library, Lucilla Vere quietly put into his hands the packet, tied and sealed just as her godfather had given it to her.

"For me?" he asked, laughing. "Are you not afraid? It would be easier for me to burn this than to offer you the cup or dagger."

"I don't know what to do now," said Lucilla, a little nervously, though with much effort to suppress her joy. "Mr. Surle said it was to be read in your presence, and Mr. Gaveston's, and Athol's; and now here we are. Lorraine, don't go," she cried, as Miss Gaveston moved towards the door; "stay with me. Mr. Surle meant the two families, yours and mine, and we are all here now."

Rourke had raised his eyes from the parchment to the two girls, and waited till Lorraine had retaken her seat. Then he smiled into her eyes with a look of quiet content, and opened the will.

"Shall I read it?" inquired Mr. Gaveston, feeling how Rourke was the last to whom the task should be assigned.

But it was Rourke's very consciousness of this which made him wish to do so, if only to prove to Athol how little it moved him. The will was folded so that he needed only gradually to open it as he read; and he went, without faltering, through the long, circumstantial deed which took his uncle's property from him, and gave it unreservedly to Lucilla Vere.

"That is all," he said, laughing, as he turned the last fold in the parchment; "except—My God! what does this mean?"

He passed the will on to Mr. Gaveston, as if its touch burnt him; then stretched out both of his hands to Athol.

"Oh! my poor fellow, he has been cruellest of all to you."

"What is it?" exclaimed Lucilla, coming eagerly up to Mr. Gaveston. "The will is all right and straightforward and legal. What is it that astonished Rourke, and makes you so—so silent?"

"The will is all right—yes, and legal, as you say," returned Mr. Gaveston, unwillingly; "but, look, the signature and seal are cut away!—neatly and carefully cut away! My poor girl, what a revolting vent for the old man's grim humor!"

"*What—what do you mean?*" cried Lucilla, bending her hot eyes over the document. "You are—joking!"

He turned the parchment towards her, and she saw the oblong and the round cut with deliberate exactness, as no one would have cared to cut them, but in the enjoyment of a keen malice. In the silence which she kept, her eyes seemed fastened to the paper, her thoughts gone beyond her control. No one broke the pause; for what could they say?

The anger of disappointment gave way to the smart of wounded pride; then that gave way to a pain far wider and deeper and sadder. In those few silent minutes the whole past and future lay stretched before her, and she saw her own folly, as nothing else could ever have shown it. She saw too, just then, the long years of love and self-denial, which she in vain had witnessed as they passed.

"Athol," she cried, gazing long and earnestly into his worn face—"O Athol!" He was close beside her now, and caught her in his arms. "You told me so; you told me he was laughing at me all the time; and I—I ridiculed the idea, and— and went on in my own way. Now, we are both—ruined!"

In presence of them all, Athol bent and kissed his sister's shaking lips.

"It will be all right," he said, no shadow of rebuke falling across his tone or face; "don't grieve, my dear; we shall soon be as—we were before."

"Never," she cried, again, "we never can. I have destroyed it all. O Athol, you don't know—you don't know half. For years I have been dragging heavy

debts about us both, and staving them off through *this*. Yes, though you prayed me not—though you were never tired of warning me. We can never pay now. Never, though I should work as hard as you are always doing. O Athol, you can never forgive me. My dear, my dear, I cannot bear to look into your face!"

Her own face was so drawn and quivering with pain that he gently turned it, and hid it on his shoulder.

"No! Blame me, reproach me," she cried, raising it restlessly again, and looking at him with a piteous eagerness; "I deserve all you can say to me. If you only knew! If you only knew!"

"I shall know," he said, gently smiling into her bewildered eyes; "we will find it all out together, and set it all right as soon as we can."

Then she hid her face indeed, and sobbed like a child in the misery of her crushed pride and keen remorse.

Rourke Trenham had moved to the window, and was looking out into the fog beyond; Lorraine, sitting at the table, had hidden her face in her hands; Mr. Gaveston had turned to the fire and was gazing into it attentively. Not one but felt that it would hurt Athol for them to leave the room as if they felt this an unbearable mortification for his sister.

"Athol, I will be so different now"—the words came unevenly between the sobs—"I will work—I will work harder than you do when we leave The Cottage. I might have thought—O Athol, I ought to have been careful when I knew you were obliged to leave the old place, where you had been toiling so long—for *me* too. But I will be different now—I will indeed—indeed!"

Rourke turned from the window with sudden start. "What is that about being turned from The Cottage?" he said, huskily. "Who dares to take that upon himself? Who dares to turn any tenant from my land?"

"Never mind it. I do not think of it, interrupted Athol, hastily.

"But *what* is it?"

"Newley has given Vere notice to leave The Cottage, explained Mr. Gaveston, quiet in his anger; "Lucilla told me of

some time ago. And we can say nothing, for the late Dr. Vere, when he first came, chose to sign an agreement making that notice sufficient for landlord and tenant. We cannot buy The Cottage from Newley, because he has no power of selling; and he will not let it to any of us who are Vere's friends, because it is only personal feeling which makes him turn Vere out. I lay it all to the election."

"Great Powers above!" cried Rourke, his face white with passion. "Was not he satisfied when he won it? Must his accursed spite follow us who lost it?"

"Never mind *him*," said Lorraine, her clear, young voice falling refreshingly on Rourke's hot, rapid tones. "Leave him to bear the burden of all this himself—as he some day must. Why need we ever speak his name?"

The flash of anger in the girl's eyes calmed Rourke, as any sign of sympathy from her could do; or any sign of her contempt for the man whom he despised.

"No; do not let us name him," he said.

"Athol, dear fellow, I will have the money ready for you. I—I can lend it you now." It was a real effort to Trenham to say this. So thoroughly had he all his life looked up to Athol, so humbly did he always compare himself with him, however arrogant might be some of his moods, that the color rose like a girl's in his dusky face when he made this simple offer.

"I know you would. I am sure you would," returned Athol, nervously; "but it would never do."

"You expect my creditors to swoop down upon me now—eh? Well I dare say they will, but I can give Cerberus an extra sop, and then be able to have the great pleasure of helping you, Vere. Lucilla, say you will be willing to take it from me. Say so, and prove yourself my friend."

"No, no," cried Lucilla, shuddering. "I cannot—I never could repay it."

"I can lend it more easily than you can at present, Trenham," put in Mr. Gaveston, pleasantly. "Take it from me, Lucilla. I would have offered before, if I had known Athol was in debt."

"Athol," asked his sister with a long surprised look into his face, "why don't you

deny that? *You* are not in debt. You would never have let them gather and press about you as I have let them do. No," she added to Mr. Gaveston, who watched her with surprise, "they are *my* debts—all mine."

"Lucilla mistakes," said Athol; "my heaviest debt has nothing to do with her."

"It was my father's," explained Lucilla, still with eagerness, to Mr. Gaveston. "That has nothing to do with Athol either."

And then she told the story of that loan, guessing nothing of how differently her words were received from those which she used to study beforehand.

"Your mother was my cousin," said Mr. Gaveston, kindly, when she had finished; "therefore I claim the privilege of setting to rights that mistake of her husband's. A fine fellow the old doctor was; and I knew more of him than any of you, even though you two were his children. Yes, I have the right to pay that respect to his memory, though I am as sure that he paid the money himself as I am that I shall pay it again *myself*."

Lucilla turned away, her eyes running over in their gratitude.

"I cannot thank you," she said; "I must wait and try another time. I will do all I can to lighten everything for Athol, as I ought to have been doing all these years. If I had, that one hundred pounds would not have been hard to pay, and I should not have been so ashamed now."

"I think old Digby has a good deal more cause to feel ashamed, and I hope he is doing so," said Mr. Gaveston, with unusual energy, as he wondered whether Lucilla Vere could ever again show the artificial vanity which had always vexed him so much in the daughter of his old friend, and the sister of such a man as Athol Vere.

"I will consult Marshall about The Cottage," put in Rourke. "There surely must lie a little power in my hands. I will ask him to-morrow."

"Don't mind about The Cottage," spoke Athol, hastily. "Please don't try to do anything for us about that. But are you really going back to London?"

"Really. Not this evening, which I am to spend among you all, as Mr. Gaveston

has planned, at Rupert's Rest; but early to-morrow morning."

"Again so soon?" asked Lorraine. "Why not stay at home for a few days now, Rourke?"

He turned to her, astonished at even these few natural words, because she so rarely expressed any wish to detain him; and they could all see how his eyes brightened when they met hers, and how his voice changed when he spoke to her.

"Until one thing is decided I must stay in town," he said, very low; "I cannot rest away from Westminster now."

"What is that about Westminster?" put in Mr. Gaveston, anxious to turn the conversation from Digby's will. "If I were Rourke I could not sit still and listen while Newley influences the nation. Save the mark!"

"Are you going to The Narrowway, Rourke?" questioned Lorraine, with nervous haste. "Please persuade Mr. Bartle to spend the evening with us too."

"Yes I am going. Come with me; do, Lorraine, he will come for you."

"What he will not do for you, he will do for no one," she said, smiling.

"How shall I find him, Vere?" asked Rourke, his lips tightening in his disappointment.

"Well, I think; always working with head and hands, and for ever either riding or walking over one of the two farms."

"He thinks with Dryden," put in Mr. Gaveston, laughing, "that

"The wise for cure on exercise depend,
God did not make His works for man to mend,"

"Yet he thinks highly of his physician, too," said Lorraine, brightly.

"And how is old Miriam?" inquired Rourke.

"Just the same—helpless and sinking, as one may say; yet perhaps hardly worse than she has been for a month or two."

"And that pretty, silly girl with her? As she must stay there, she is attentive and useful, I hope?"

"I cannot very well judge," said Athol, doubtfully.

"I will go and see Miriam. I never thought of it before," said Lucilla, looking

almost piteously from one to another. "Athol often proposed it, but I never heeded. I will go. I may be of use to her, and able to do something."

"Thank you," said Trenham, with an earnestness which made the tears start to Lucilla's eyes.

"That's right," remarked Mr. Gaveston, cheerfully. "Lorraine goes *there*, I believe, though she generally fights shy of Newley's vicinity. She goes, although (if all tales are true) there are a hundred chances to one of her meeting him at or near that lodge."

"That tale is true," said Trenham, with cool sternness.

"I hope your fellow, Brent, is wise enough to have broken off his engagement with the girl."

"I hope so too. Lorraine, I want him to marry your maid. Is there any chance for him, think you?"

"How can I possibly tell?" she said, with her sweet laugh. "But I would not despair if I were he."

And so the subject of Digby's cruel will dropped through, and the group separated for a little time, to meet again at Rupert's Rest for dinner.

Rourke went alone to the Narrowway to fetch Abram, and to tell him all about the will. The old man stood in speechless astonishment. He could not understand a nature capable of preparing a vicious, practical joke to be perpetrated after death.

"Yet I *might* have believed anything of him," he mused. "Well, you've had justice done you for once, dear lad, that's *one* comfort. And he had the grace to make her promise not to read the will until the lawyer and the strange people were gone—you say?—that's another. But, Rourke, he's sorry now, I fancy, for that grim jest of his."

Rourke fancied so too, but was not clear enough on the subject to hazard a discussion of it.

Through that happy evening, which so many of them liked to look back upon in after years, Rourke was the merriest of all. Yet Athol Vere was not the only one who noticed how that one harassing thought was still ever present in his mind, below

and beyond all other thoughts, unmoved by the light, pleasant words which were so often on his lips that night.

CHAPTER XX.

It was on the 28th of March, 1871. At the very window where we first saw Lorraine Gaveston looking in upon her sister's firelit sitting-room, she now stood looking out into the chill sunlight, but seeing nothing of the snowdrops or the violets, seeing only, far off among the hills, her pictured thoughts. The beautiful young face was raised a little, and the slight, rounded form was leaning wearily against the glass, when Rourke Trenham came through the door behind her; came silently, though less in the fear of disturbing her than in the intense calm of his suppressed excitement. She heard him come. She knew he could only that hour have returned from London, and, except when he had run down for a few hours, in his joy and hopefulness, on the eleventh, she had not seen him for six weeks. But she could not turn.

"Lorraine, Lorraine."

That call took from her in a moment all power of resistance, and she turned to face him; her slender figure still wearily resting against the window, and the soft light enfolding her and making her beautiful beyond all words.

"Lorraine, this is the twenty-eighth. I said I would come then. Did you read of what was done in Parliament yesterday?"

"No; I have not seen the papers. They are in the library now."

"The bill was thrown out by a majority of twenty-six."

With such a dangerous calm the words were uttered—and so strongly developed on Rourke's face was that one line of pain between his brows—that a great fear fell upon the girl that her courage would break down at last.

"O Lorraine," he cried, the veins rising in his hands as he locked them together, "in mercy forget such heathen prejudices; forget them, and come to me, my own beloved."

"This is not a heathen prejudice, Rourke."

So quickly her heart beat, that he could even see it through her close-fitting dress; so intense was the misery of her eyes, that she longed to hide them from his probing, yearning gaze.

"You must think it so; you *do* think it so, because it is so. My darling, my darling," he exclaimed, his chest and shoulders heaving in his strong emotion, "what do you mean? To-day—ah, to-day!—I dreamed how I should come to you and tell you once more how deathlessly I loved you, and how no shadow of reproach could rest upon us, if you would listen to me at last. And it is *this* I have to tell, and this I have to hear! Lorraine," he added, with quickened breath, "you will break that accursed law—an unjust law *must* be broken."

"It would be as great a sin to break that law, Rourke, as any other we hold sacred."

"I would break a hundred laws for you," he said, in passionate, stifled tones. "But you—you would not commit the most trivial fault on earth for me."

"Oh, hush," she pleaded, almost as if she felt the shadow upon her of how she should be tried. "Why should we talk of *sinning* for each other?"

"*This* is no sin. If I love you better than all the world besides, and you consent to be my wife, what has all the world besides got to do with it? Look at it so for one minute."

"Rourke," she faltered, her whole heart pleading in her eyes, "why can we not be brother and sister—always, I mean, as we have been?"

"Because," he said, his short, passionate laugh grating upon her, "it is simply and utterly impossible."

"Anything else is more impossible," the girl said, bravely. "And not more impossible now, Rourke, than it would have been if that bill had passed. No words said in Parliament could make me think differently in my own heart; and whatever law is passed you and I can be only what we—have been."

"Why?"

"Because of Una."

"Do you think," he asked, while scald-

ing tears rose fast in his eyes, "that Una, from heaven, would tell us it was sin? No, by my faith in God, such thoughts are a mockery to Him who must have loved us all."

"We cannot judge of that," said Lorraine, with sad earnestness; "we can only do what we think right, seeing but one step at a time."

"If such ridiculous laws could prevent our loving each other," he said, "they might serve some purpose, perhaps. But they cannot; and what is the use of other power, when they have no power in *that*? I love you as my wife. Can any law under Heaven take that love from me?—and can any law make it sin for us to marry, we who have no other ties? O Lorraine, have pity, and forget such bigotry. Good men and women have done it again and again—men and women whom even *you* would call good. You shatter all my faith by your hardness."

"It ought not to shatter your faith, Rourke, for us to do what is right, when we are left to choose for ourselves."

"Right!" he echoed, his face stern in its pallor. "You are mad when you say it—as mad as I am growing! O Lorraine, I have tried so hard; fought against so much; been so often baffled; yet never despaired! And is *this* all? Is my life to end so? Ah! my God, must I bear about with me always this craving, unsatisfied love?"

"It will not always be so—craving and unsatisfied," she said, drearily.

"It will," he cried, "until you lose your prejudice, or I lose my power of loving. They make me doubt even—even the mercy of Heaven; and I swear—"

"Hush!" she cried, raising her clasped hands to him appealingly. "If you swear, Rourke, I will do so too—and you know *how*. Rourke"—the desolate, low voice was broken in its pain, and heavy shadows gathered about her eyes—"what you ask me to consent to would be no marriage—no marriage!"

And, when the words were uttered, her head fell forward in her hands, and bitter sobs shook her frame. No movement did he make towards her; but his face was

hard and almost cruel in its anguish, as he watched her standing there, still wrapped and folded in the soft, fair light.

"Why do you cry?" he asked, the iciness of his tone startling even himself; "you do not care for me, so what misery have you? You have chosen to send me back into my blank life alone, so what pity have you for *my* misery? Why do you cry?"

But the low, stifled sobs were his only answer.

"Oh! don't mind it," he said, a tightness grasping his throat; "I shall soon be all right again—used to it, you know. I can get used to anything now, I believe. When I have given up believing in anything or anybody I shall be—all right."

"O Rourke," the girl cried, falling on her knees before him, in a vague, awful fear, "don't speak so—it breaks my heart. O my compassionate God, have mercy!—have mercy! Rourke, He will hear us both together; He will help us if we *both* ask Him. I am too weak to pray alone, though I try all day and night—all day and night. O Rourke say it with me. It will help us, even if we do not do it as we ought."

Softly and tenderly he raised her. "I prayed once," he whispered, with a low sobbing in his breath too, though the words were unbroken. "God must have known how I put all my heart in that prayer. Yet he sent no answer. Since then I have not thought it of any use."

"Perhaps," mused Lorraine, looking wistfully up into his harassed face, and wishing she knew how to answer him—"perhaps He waits to see how we spend the after-time—the waiting time, while we look for His answer."

"I spent that, I suppose, as I spend all other time," replied Rourke, with a short, sad laugh, "in loving you, and hating Newley."

"You will try again, Rourke," she pleaded.

"I don't know yet. I want to know and understand how it will be then—afterwards. Will this love, which has been my misery, die with me, or will it live on as it lives in my soul to-night, unreturned and

unaccepted? In either case I cannot fancy that world being better to me than this. But if I were to be as I was before I saw you, or if it were to be that we should love each other, why, then—Lorraine, my darling," he added, with a quick change of tone, "tell me whom we shall love afterwards, and who will love us."

"I think that all we love will love us—there," she answered softly. "And—there will be such a rest!"

"For me?" he questioned, dreamily. "Can even my grave be restful for me? This has been—lately—such a troubled world!"

"Oh! hush, Rourke!" she cried, raising her pitiful eyes; "you are so young and strong and brave to speak so wearily."

Looking at her in her wonderful, pleading beauty, an old longing came over him and mastered him.

Tenderly, but with impassioned strength, he folded his arms about her, and strained her to his panting heart.

"Just once, if only just once, I may hold you so, my sweet, as if you were my own," he whispered. "If we are to part, let me know one moment of such bliss as I have dreamed of. It is a poor request—one moment, just one moment, to stand soul to soul, as we might have stood through life. My own beloved, my best beloved!" Again and again he repeated the words he loved to use to her, holding her from him now, and looking at her with all his heart in his sad eyes.

"O Rourke," she cried, feeling this scene was growing unbearable to both, "let me go. It will be better after this."

"It will be *nothing* after this; nothing for me ever now but a great empty, yawning solitude. Lorraine," he said, his voice a very whisper in its curbed emotion, "kiss me—just once—as if you were my own, my very own. Are you going to say that will be a sin?"

"How could it be?" she asked, making an effort to smile in her startled nervousness. "Many brothers and sisters-in-law kiss each other every day."

"Never mind others," he interrupted, impatiently; "kiss me because I love you with all my heart and soul; and as if—

just this once—as if you loved me too, my dearest."

She raised her head, and gently laid her lips on his, but through all his frame he felt their quivering touch.

"My darling," he murmured, pausing before he gave her his own long parting kiss, "how can you be so pitiless to me, yet look so gentle and so beautiful?"

A wild, almost unconquerable longing came over her to tell him the truth at last. How she had loved him for years before he had sought her; and how, through these later years, her love had been as deep as his own, while it was ever utterly hopeless. The words hovered on her lips. He could have read them in her eyes, if he had only faintly guessed that such a truth could have been there to tell.

"Then it is good-bye?" he questioned, in a low, husky tone; "and this is my last kiss, *my very last*, for my lips shall touch no others after yours till—till they could not waken into warmth again even by such a kiss as this. Good-bye—*good-bye*! If we could only die as we are, before the word was said. Ah! how pained you look even at seeing my misery! Then think what it is to bear it always. My dear, dear love, good-bye!"

Quite motionless she stood where he had left her, long after the sound of his horse's quick tread was lost among the trees. Quite motionless, with a nameless fear and foreboding pressing upon her. The scene without had grown confused and dim to her when she came slowly from the window. The fire was dying in the grate, the room seemed full of a vague, silent gloom which made her shudder; yet it was broad sunny daylight still.

"Rourke will have reached home now," she said to herself, unconsciously seeking to bring light and happiness about her. "I will go to papa. This room is so solitary."

The girl's hands went wearily up to press her burning temples, where there was a weight of agony beyond that parting pain; and then she left the room, dreading, in her unaccountable cowardice, even to look round at the spot where she and Rourke had stood.

CHAPTER XXI.

SLOWLY Lorraine turned over the sheets of the *Times* when she reached the library, not anxious for the intelligence which could never have affected her in any way, but simply to distract her mind from this vague foreboding which had seized her. She knew exactly in which corner of the paper to look for the Parliamentary intelligence, but she chose to gain it slowly. And when she had gained it, she read it slowly too; word by word, as if it were written in a language she was studying. And when she reached the last word of all, she laid the paper back upon the table, let her arms fall upon it, and her head upon them. But though she pressed her eyelids in all their weight of tears, she saw, distinct above all, Rourke's face, as he fought against the final crushing of his one dauntless hope.

"If there could but be peace for him," she thought, yearningly; "if that unrestful hope could only die for him as surely as it died for me three years ago, it would be easier to bear. His whole life would be different then; it might be a life to make us proud of him, and, more than all, it might be a happy one. How can I make him quite, quite understand that this subject is over forever between us? Perhaps he does understand now, I think he must; but how can I make him so sure that that dream can never harass him again? He would be more—he would be less unhappy then."

And it was just as she thought this thought that Athol Vere entered the room, and stood a moment irresolute, heart-sick to see the utter despondency of her attitude. She raised her wet face, startled at the sound of his steps, and then his momentary resolution of leaving her vanished.

"Your father sent me to look at the papers," he said. "I did not know any one was here, so I did not knock. Lorraine, my—my darling little friend, how it grieves me to see you in grief!"

She tried to keep back the tears while she greeted him, but the very sight of his sympathy and pain renewed them, and her head drooped again, and her tears fell hot and quick.

"Dear," he said softly, laying his hand upon her hair, "I wish I might comfort you. I wish I could."

For he knew that such a sorrow as he had seen upon her face in that glance, was borne of a love which he had failed to win through all his life's devotion, and he knew too that it was borne not for herself alone.

"You do comfort me always—always," she faltered, her sore heart unconsciously relying on the patient strength below his yearning tones. "It always comforts me to hear you or to see you—it always did."

"My pet!"—the old name which had, from his lips, been her childhood's one caress, slipped from them now unconsciously, as he took her burning hands and held them tightly in his own—"my pet, you know why this is so, because you know how I have loved you all my life."

He said it very simply in his earnestness. To him the fact of his love, so sadly familiar, explained Lorraine's trust in him; his love for her, apart from any thought of its return. He did not even realize what the words might mean—what they would mean as another man would utter them. He did not expect her to notice or reply to them. They were the simple explanation of her reliance on him—that was all.

"Yes, Athol, I know," she answered, her hands burning in his, her face full of a sad longing to do right. "I have always known. But why—why did not you make me listen to you long ago? O Athol, if you had, it would have saved so much; and now——"

"Now is it too late?"

He asked it so quietly, and stood so still while he waited for her answer, that if she had known him a little less than she did, she might have fancied that the answer to this question was as the answer to any other question.

"Athol," she said, the color mounting slowly to her face, her eyes wide and wistful, "let there be nothing but truth between us. From you it always has been truth; but I—I want you to know it now from me."

"I do know it," he answered, very low. For deep in his soul the iron had entered

and he would spare her all he
 u sure, Athol? Are you sure
 tand exactly?" she asked, wist-
 with a great lightening of her
 hink she need not speak of

ll, I think."

Athol, do you not see how far I
 rom being worthy to take such
 u have lavished on me as long
 member? Because——"

?" he questioned gently.

what I could give you is only
 tired heart."

ou give me that, Lorraine?"

gly—so willingly, if it were
 g. You deserve a love so dif-
 d; a first, last, only love. I—I
 come to you for a rest."

can what you say?" he asked.
 est in my love?"

you know me better, I believe,
 know myself; but I do not think
 you can know what a rest it
 or me to feel that you would

I am, and let me always feel
 id care about me, *knowing how*

uld give me your last love,
 could not give me the first or

she said most earnestly, "my
 never done anything but fight
 it love you know of, which
 s, always, against my will. No
 r been good for me but yours;
 have—if I have ever pictured
 o come into my life, it has
 with—I mean no one has ever
 ny thoughts the future left to

ing, my darling!" For an in-
 s startled by the flash of pas-
 which brought the words rush-
 is lips and the scarlet to his
 she saw the old quietness steal
 nore. "Lorraine, my child, if
 —pity either for Rourke or for
 ay be sorry afterwards. Shall
 see?"

never be sorry, Athol," she
 ve always cared too much for

you for that—always. If you can have pati-
 ence with me—more patience now even than
 you have always had—and if you are sure
 you wish it, knowing all that has been in
 my heart—then please take me for your
 own."

"My darling!" he cried, with a bright-
 ness in his eyes which she had never seen
 before, "I always loved you best on earth.
 I feel as if even this hope could not make
 me love you more; but, oh! my pet, it has
 given me a new life. I forget my poverty,
 and all the struggles past and to come;
 everything except that you will now, per-
 haps, learn to love me."

"An easy lesson, Athol," said the girl,
 her voice almost sad in its humility.

"And if," he added very gently, "it is as
 you would have me think, not all for my
 sake that you come to me to-night, still,
 love, you come to me at last of your own
 will; and—some day this love may grow
 and strengthen into such as I have
 dreamed of."

So it was that on that March afternoon
 Rourke and Lorraine parted in that room
 where they had first met; and Athol—
 where he had first looked upon the baby
 face which was to grow so dear to him—
 held it to his beating heart at last, and
 took a lover's kisses from the sweet, trem-
 ulous lips.

When he had left her she fell again into
 her old, drooping posture at the table.
 She had a vague miserable longing upon
 her, which most of us must know; a long-
 ing to be something which she could not
 be, to be somewhere where she was not;
 yet without knowing what or where. She
 never felt this—as she remembered with a
 throb of joy and gratitude unutterable—
 when Athol was near her. Perhaps after
 this day was gone she would never feel it
 again, as she had felt it so often and often.
 She was trying hard to stifle this feeling
 when her father came into the room.
 Whether it was that the suffering in his
 child's white face struck him, or whether,
 now that he was to lose her, he was sud-
 denly awakened to all that she had been
 to him while he had never acknowledged it,
 perhaps not even understood it, cannot be
 told; but he felt his heart yearn towards

her with a love which must have been lying dormant through all her life.

"Father," she whispered, coming to meet him, and calling him wistfully by the name she loved to use, and which Una had scarcely ever uttered, "Father, I wish—" But there the words she meant to say faltered and failed, and the tears rose in her eyes—they were so terribly near to-day, while that nameless fear and foreboding hovered about her.

Seeing her struggling with these tears, he softly laid her head upon his shoulder, for the sight pained him more than he had thought that any emotion of hers could pain him; so seldom since her childhood had anyone seen tears in her beautiful, brave eyes. This new sympathy made his caress almost sad in its rare tenderness.

"Father, can this be? Are you sorry to lose me? Do you love me a little at last?"

In one moment before the father's shamed eyes stretched the years through which his daughter's love had been an unacknowledged and a wasted blessing. He could see how she had hungered for the affection which he had withheld, and now he felt it rushing into his heart like a torrent—now that he knew she was going from him, never to be his home-child any more.

"Love you!" he said, the words coming straight from his heart, though broken in his keen remorse. "Dearly, dearly, my child."

"Then it has not been dislike through all these years, father? I shall be so glad to remember that! Not dislike, even though I seemed born only to give you a terrible pain."

"Hush! my child, these unconscious rebukes are more than I can bear. I have been hard and unjust to you always. I have said to myself again and again—ay, as if to harden myself against you—that you caused your mother's death. I never thought—never till now—God help me!—how He might have given you to me to make the desolation less; for you were left to me when all were taken. My child, my only one, how dreary it is to have found this out too late!"

"Have you been happier, father, we two

together—than you will be when I am gone!"

"I shall know it better and more hopelessly when you *are* gone," he said.

Lorraine looked up startled into her father's face. Something made her fancy he had read her sorrow—and Rourke's.

"It has been a long misunderstanding," he said, "but nothing need come between us now, Lorraine."

"Nothing," she echoed, with a quiet content.

And as he kissed her then, there flashed across her memory the time when in her childhood she had said she would be willing to give up all else if she might only win his love. All else was not taken now, and this was given.

Athol could not help noticing, as they sat together, how the chill of Mr. Gaveston's manner had melted, and he felt that he had double cause for gratitude in his happiness. But, though his gladness was infectious, Lorraine could not lose the haunting sense of foreboding which oppressed her. While they were still lingering about the bright wood fire, unwilling to separate, the butler entered the room with a message for Dr. Vere, from Winterfield. Brent was waiting in the hall.

"Send Brent in," said Mr. Gaveston, issuing exactly the order Lorraine longed to give.

Her eyes were fixed upon the door; her hand pressed against her heart; for it seemed to her as if its beating could be heard through all the room. Were the tidings coming now which should explain this haunting fear which had weighed upon her since she and Rourke parted? Athol had risen. If Lorraine could have seen his face she might have fancied that he, too, had been filled with such a foreboding.

"Who is ill, Brent?"

"No one exactly ill, sir," returned the man, in haste to set all anxiety at rest; "but the baby is not well, and Miss Sheffield would be more comfortable if you would look in, in the course of the evening. He's hot and feverish, sir—not ill; but she is always more frightened when the master's out."

"I will go at once," Dr. Vere said.

Lorraine drew a long breath of relief.

"Father, may I go too?" she pleaded, when Brent had left the room again. "It is a pleasant evening, and not late. I should so like a walk!"

"With Athol," he smiled. "Of course you would. But, my dear," he added, touching her soft, dark cheek, "you look pale and tired now; wait for your walk until to-morrow. It will be dark before you can return."

"Oh! no, papa—to-night, please. On whom, if not me, has Una's baby a claim?"

"Go, dear," he said, almost hurriedly; "but do not make yourself anxious. You know how easily Miss Shefford is frightened. I shall follow you if you are late; but I trust you will not be so. You are quite right. Except his father no one can be nearer to Una's baby than we are."

"Except his father—and he is not there. Athol, will you go now? and I never asked you if you would take me."

He smiled in wonderful gladness to see her so willing to go with him anywhere, and a few minutes afterwards they were on their way; and Athol was congratulating himself that he had chanced to have a pocket medicine-case with him.

The soft March twilight now was gliding on its dusky wings among the distant hills, and here and there a light shone out from cottage windows, struggling with the yet conquering daylight. They found the church lighted as they passed near it in crossing Hôhve Park, and the voices of the singers reached them as they went in silence on.

"I wish I had remembered," said the girl, raising her face to the pale light of the great east window. "I should like to have gone to-night."

Athol asked for no reason. He seemed to understand exactly what the service would have been to her. After those few words they walked on silently again until they reached the Winterfield Lodge, and there they paused involuntarily. The door was ajar, and from within there came the sound of raised and angry tones.

"It is Mr. Newley," said Lorraine, in a whisper of suppressed disdain, "and—and, Athol, it is Brent, too. They are quarrel-

ling; and—listen! those are Rhoda's sobs. Oh! how cruel when Miriam is so ill."

"I must go in and silence the girl at any rate," said Dr. Vere. "Should you mind my leaving you a moment? Walk a little further in among the trees, my darling, out of sight of anyone who may come out; or will you walk slowly on towards Winterfield?"

"I will walk on," she said; "it is light and pleasant still in the Loop, and I—I don't like the shade of these trees."

Rhoda was crying noisily when Athol entered the cottage kitchen, holding her handkerchief to her mouth, but not allowing it to impede the vision of her angry, flashing eyes.

"I will never, never speak to you again," she was saying, between her sobs, without either addressing anyone in particular, or eliciting any response.

Athol Vere looked round the room with his eyes full of quiet contempt. Horton Newley, propped against the table in the centre of the room and watching Rhoda with a half-smile of disdainful amusement, took no heed of him at all. Brent, facing them both, went on with his interrupted speech.

"I despised *him* first, Rhoda, despised him for following and tempting you; now I despise you for listening to him, and despise *you* far the most of the two. Do you think any honest man would take you for his wife *now*?"

"Come, this is rather theatrical language and bearing for a farm servant, it strikes me," put in Newley, rising and taking up his hat with a laugh. "Don't make such a noise, girl," he added, turning airily to Rhoda. "The poor simpleton will come to his senses soon enough."

Passing Horton Newley, Athol paused a moment before Rhoda.

"Do you forget the poor dying woman in there?" he asked, in his grave, forcible tones—"you, to whose care she is left."

"I—I didn't want to cry," the girl said, with a frightened renewal of her tears; "but—Andrew has been so rude to—Mr. Newley."

"And what does this fellow's rudeness signify to me, do you think?" inquired

Newley, coldly. "Let the doctor pass and see after his patient."

Before the words were finished Dr. Vere had passed on into the inner room. In a few moments he returned and spoke to Brent.

"If your master does not want you just yet would you go on an errand for me?"

The man came forward eagerly to do the bidding of his master's friend.

"Go up to the church, will you, and wait to speak to Mr. Spencer when the service is over. Tell him from me that Miriam cannot live through this night. He will know what to do. Wait and see if he needs you after that."

Brent answered nothing beyond the lifting of his hand to his hair. Heartily ashamed he was of having been tempted into loud dispute, almost, as it were, in the presence of the dying. There was a deep scorn just then in his honest and straightforward nature for the two who had tempted him, and it grew rather than diminished while he kept his patient watch at the vestry door through the latter half of the evening service.

"If your ministrations in there are over, Dr. Vere," said Newley, with a supercilious gesture towards the inner room, "we can leave the nurse in charge."

"Miriam can not need care for more than a few hours longer, Rhoda," said Athol, with a haughtiness which was most unusual to him. "Whether the noisy scene at which you have assisted has hastened this, I leave you to judge."

"I am waiting to witness your departure from my cottage, Dr. Vere," said Newley, his voice as quiet as Athol's own, but the veins rising ominously in his forehead. "And to me this time is valuable."

But for the thought of Lorraine waiting, and Rourke's baby ailing, Athol would have waited and defied this man. As it was he left the room quietly, and Newley, following him out, closed the door smilingly behind them both.

"Qualms," smiled Newley, as the two men hesitated a moment in the little garden—"qualms about a quarrel in that old woman's place. But you need have no

such sickly fancies where I am concerned. No power could make me quarrel with you, any more than with your ruined friend down there."

And then Newley, in his careless glance towards Winterfield, caught sight of Lorraine's figure slowly lessening on the wide, bare drive, which the young trees could not shade. Athol saw the start he gave, and detected the tone of jealous anger when he spoke next.

"Pleasant, that, to have a young lady waiting for you while you condole the sick and dying—cutting the process short, perhaps, for that agreeable reason. I would not go on to Winterfield, if I were you, if your journey is to see the master there; for he must pass here if he goes home to-night. I intend to wait here to see him, and I advise you to do the same"

"Your conduct can not influence mine in any way" said Athol, his voice stirred by a passion as intense as Newley's but kept bravely under control.

But, leisurely as he passed through the garden-gate, his heart was sick with a nameless, keen foreboding when he joined Lorraine again.

"How is Miriam?" she asked.

"Very ill, dear; very near death to-night, I think. When I have seen the little one, and taken you home, I shall go back and stay with her, though I can be but of little use. Spencer will go to her when the service is over."

"And it was really Mr. Newley we heard of? I—I hope he did not speak to you there, Athol?"

He smiled at the anxiety in her eyes.

"You need not fear, my pet I am not Rourke, you know. He has no motive in humiliating me. Well, after a little time his house will be my home no longer, and I shall not think of him again."

"What evil he has done!" she said; "and yet there are no real accusations we can bring against him. He has a right to say he will keep The Cottage in his own hands. Who is to guess what this means for you, my poor Athol?"

"Never poor again; never poor after to-night," he answered clasping tight the hand that lay upon his arm; "except—except,

Lorraine, my darling, that my poverty is now to be your poverty."

"And your wealth mine, Athol," she whispered; "your wealth of kindness and earnestness and bright content."

And the light was clear, and she could see with what new gladness he received such words from her, now that the heavy cloud of his despair was lifted from his love.

They found Rourke's little boy tossing restlessly in his nurse's arms; his lips and cheeks hot and feverish, and his voice querulous and low. But there was nothing really the matter, Dr. Vere said, with his reassuring truthfulness, as, laying his cool hand on the child's forehead and pulse, he sat beside the pretty crib where he had laid him. Soon afterwards, when the bright eyes had closed in sleep, the young physician rose and stood by the fire, looking round the large, bright room.

"He will probably not awake for six or seven hours, Miss Shefford," he said: "but I will call in again before I go home. I cannot say when that will be, because old Miriam is very ill, and I may not be able to leave her soon; but when I can I will come round. Trenham himself will be at home then."

"I hope so," replied the old lady, betraying her own anxiety. "He has been out ever since his return from London, and he came by the mid-day train. Has Mr. Newley, too, returned to-day?"

"Yes."

"I wish he had not come," murmured Miss Shefford, with ill-concealed irritability; "and I don't like that horse Mr. Trenham is riding. I never did, though I never felt so——"

"Vestris, do you mean?" put in Dr. Vere.

"Vestris—yes," she repeated, walking to the window, and looking out into the slowly-gathering dusk; "I never liked that horse—even for him."

"Even for him!" laughed Athol, cheerily. "Why, Miss Shefford, Vestris is a slave in Trenham's hands. And I verily believe he could, as Mr. Bartle said the other day, guide her over the fallen branch there across the brook!"

"But he looked so harassed and restless," continued the old lady from her watching post, "I could not bear to see him start, only that I felt sure he was going to Rupert's Rest. Lorraine, my dear"—as the girl hurriedly rose—"are you not going to stay?"

"No—o!" she answered, shrinking a little to Athol's side, with a timidity unusual with her: "not this evening, Miss Shefford; but I will come as soon as—as ever it is light in the morning. Athol says there is really no cause to be anxious about baby, else I would stay."

"Good night, Miss Shefford," said Dr. Vere; "we shall be sure to meet Trenham, and we will hasten him."

The March twilight was deepening rapidly when they started. It would not be dark though, said Athol, until they had reached home.

That was all they either of them said until they were out in the Loop, where no shadows but the slight ones of the saplings impeded the vague, dusk view from end to end. Both Athol and Lorraine felt unaccountably uneasy about Rourke, yet neither ventured to put in words even a doubt, much less a fear. Lorraine's steps slackened on the wide, gravelled path, and her companion, understanding the reason of this, loitered himself, too; yet still neither mentioned a hope of meeting Rourke.

Presently, in front of them, a figure came from the shadow of the old trees surrounding the lodge, and advanced slowly towards them.

"Newley has been patient in his watch," said Athol, with a laugh, which sounded to Lorraine like a stranger's laugh.

"I wonder what he is so anxious to say to Rourke to-night," she pondered, gazing at Horton Newley's figure, slight and fashionably clad.

"Something which I trust God's mercy may prevent his saying," replied Athol, with grave earnestness. "He has returned flushed with triumph; Trenham has returned depressed by defeat. From my soul I pray they may not meet to night."

"And I wish we need not meet," said the girl, the passionate crimson chasing the pallor from her cheeks as she rapidly

comprehended all that he both said and left unsaid.

In another moment they knew that they were not to meet. As Newley walked steadily towards them a sound broke in upon the stillness—the sound of a horse's tread behind, clear, distinct, and rapid.

Newley turned with eagerness. It was evident that he had been waiting for this. In the spot where he had halted and turned, in the centre of the straight carriage-way he waited until Rourke Trenham, on horse-back, came from the gloom among the trees out into the cold and silvery dusk of the open field.

Vestris came on, stepping daintily under her rider's firm, skilled hand, until she reached the spot where Newley stood directly in her way. Then Rourke drew her back a pace or two.

Lorraine started back, but Athol made an involuntary step forward. "Wait," she whispered. "Let that man leave him."

They were even near enough to hear the measured sound of Newley's cool and even voice, though they could not distinguish the words he uttered. But they caught every word of Rourke's answer.

"I advise you to say no more. Move from my way, or, by my soul, I will ride over you where you stand."

A cool laugh greeted this speech; then Newley laid one hand on Vestris' sleek head. A few of the taunting words reached Lorraine's ears—her own name at last.

"Lorraine, Lorraine, stand back, my darling!" cried Athol, as she started forward with a little cry upon her lips. "They will part now. I am going. Stand aside here, my love."

He had drawn her back now among the young trees, whispering fast and breathlessly his entreaty to her not to stir. But she hardly comprehended, though she obeyed, and stood quite motionless where he had left her; her eyes fastened on Rourke's face where now she could even see the rapid and awful change of expression which followed Newley's words. For a moment it seemed as if a fire burned behind his eyes, while all his face beside was chill and stiff. And it seemed to her as if she had

seen this look there once before; but whether in reality, or in some terrible dream or fancy, she could not tell.

In another instant his spurs were deep in Vestris' flanks, the fingers of his left hand tight and firm upon the bridle, the whip raised in his right hand as if he would have struck down with one cut the man who, with a cold, taunting smile upon his lips, stood in his way, stubborn and resolute. Next moment the whip descended across the head of the curbed horse. Then blindly she followed her master's guiding.

One minute afterwards Horton Newley lay in the centre of the wide avenue, his face—untouched and still smiling—upturned in the chill, dim light, the figure crushed a little on the chest, the handsome clothes untorn, though they bore here and there the soiled impress of a horse's hoof.

And Rourke had ridden on before Athol met him. No words passed between the friends. Rourke—his lips drawn back from his closed teeth—smiled in his awed surprise, while a glance of eager recollection, and of relief, struggled into his burning eyes. But Athol, even had it been to save the life of both of them, could not have spoken at that moment. Standing in Vestris' way just as Newley had done, he seized her bit in his left hand. The animal was wild and restive now, and, under a guiding hand, would have trampled Athol under foot, as she had trampled Horton Newley. But Rourke's touch upon the bridle now was a restraining touch, as Athol knew.

"What is it, Vere?" Trenham asked, dismounting and standing opposite him still with the hot light within his eyes, and the whiteness of great agony upon his lips—"What—is it?"

Catching his breath quickly, as if he dare not trust himself one instant's pause, Athol raised his right hand, and, with a rapid, shuddering gesture, dealt Rourke a blow upon the temple, aimed and timed with a consummate skill, swift and sure, and certain in its purpose. Just as if struck by sudden death, Rourke fell to the ground, and lay near Newley in the wide dim drive. But his face was not upturned,

and his riding-dress was unsoiled and uncrushed.

No cry escaped Lorraine's lips, but a wordless one went rushing from her heart up into the silent heaven above this spot. Then she crept forward and stood beside Athol, looking down and thinking in her anguish that Rourke's dead face was changed far less in these few minutes than Athol's living one.

"Lorraine!—oh! my darling, this is terrible for you!" he faltered, pausing a moment, with the bridle still in his hand. "Oh! would to God that I had been alone! Wait one moment. Stand aside for one moment."

He took Rourke's whip from the ground; and, with it in his hand, moved on a few paces nearer to Winterfield, leading the panting mare; then he stood again, dropped the bit, moved aside, and gave the restive animal a sharp cut across the neck. The next moment she was galloping homeward, the reins hanging loose, the saddle empty—a frightened riderless mare, with whom her master's secret was safe.

Lorraine stood watching, as if in a dream; then her eyes wandered back to Athol, as he turned again, with the unnatural calm still on his face. But before he had joined her she had fallen on her knees beside Rourke, and hidden her face as if she dared see no more.

"Lorraine, be strong—just for a little longer," said Athol, in his new tones of still authority. "If you faint all hope is over. Move away, my darling, where you cannot see."

"I will not faint. I will stay here."

He met her pleading eyes, and read their steadfastness.

"Thank God that it was you who were here with me—if any one," he said, in a low, concentrated tone, as he stooped and gazed searchingly into Rourke's motionless face.

Lorraine waited breathlessly until he slowly rose again, and drew a long breath of relief. Near Rourke's outstretched hand he laid the whip he had been using; everything else he left untouched. Then he went back a few steps to the spot where lay the prostrate form of Horton Newley,

and bending, took it up in his arms. Lorraine, still kneeling beside Rourke, watched him, half bewildered. The whole nature of the man seemed changed; yet all that he did she instinctively knew to be the best; while she still trembled in every limb to see the calm and strength which he could show at such a time as this.

Slowly he bore Horton Newley's inanimate form along the drive in the direction of the farm, following the track of the galloping horse, for fifty paces or more. Then he laid it down in the centre of the avenue, just as it had lain above when he had come up too late; the face upturned, and the marks of the horse's feet so plainly visible on the dark dress.

When this was done Athol brought Horton Newley's hat from the spot where he had fallen and placed it near the prostrate form. Then he joined Lorraine again, and she rose and stood beside him, waiting for his words; her fingers locked together, looking mistily at him, with a fearful pallor on her face.

"Lorraine, be brave, my darling, for a few minutes longer," he said; and even she could not guess at his mingled suffering, as he looked from the motionless figure on the gravel to her white, bewildered face. "Go back to Winterfield at once. Run in terror and alarm the household. Send a mounted messenger into Kumley for Dr. Thorne, then on into Atton for Dr. Meredith. Say that Mr. Trenham has been thrown, and that the horse has trampled Mr. Newley. That is all. Send another man for your father and Mr. Spencer."

"But—but," she faltered, her eyes piercing the distance as she spoke, literally startled, too, by her own voice, "Mr. Spencer was to be there, you said—at the lodge, Athol."

He started, looking forward with bent brows and quickened breath; knowing well that the little window in the lodge which faced them was the window of Miriam's room. If the curate had been there through those few awful minutes! Athol shook the thought from him, as he might have shaken an infectious touch, and turned to Lorraine again.

"Do you understand? Rourke was rid-

ing a young horse which had been doing nothing for several weeks. You saw it galloping home riderless; and here Rourke lies, and there Newley. Do you quite understand?"

"I quite understand," she said, the agony of understanding quite as great to her as the agony of telling had been to him. And then she turned away, and ran like a frightened child towards the farm, speeding the faster the further she left him behind, partly in her implicit obedience to his words, partly in real terror now that he was not with her. Two men were standing at the lawn gate at Winterfield when she reached it. She saw that alarm had been taken, but she did not stop to ask or let them tell. In a voice full of terror, yet with a clearness there was no mistaking, she gave Athol's orders. The men, without pause or question, separated; one to summon the two physicians, the other to fetch Mr. Gaveston. She followed them to the stables, shuddering when she saw the beautiful black mare saddled and panting in her stall.

"Is there no one here whom I can send to Hohve? Brent!—where is Brent? He will not mind going on—this horse."

But there was no Brent, though by this time the whole household was out in alarm.

The news had run like wildfire from one to another—the master and Mr. Newley had both been killed by the young thoroughbred.

"Where is Brent?" asked Lorraine again, her voice clear and distinct in all its agony.

Brent had not been seen for hours, they told her. He had been sent by the master to inquire for old Miriam, and had not returned.

One of the stable-boys came forward, anxious to take Brent's place.

"I'll go, miss, if I may ride the colt master is breaking in for you."

"Thank you," the girl said simply, though her pulses quickened at the reminder, even through all her other pain. "Then ride at once to Hohve, and tell them what—what you have heard. And—and," she added, when he had mounted, "can I trust you with two other errands?"

"I'll do them, miss," said the lad, anxiously.

"Then as you return from Hohve through the park, call at Hohve cottage, and see Miss Vere herself. Beg her not to be anxious if she does not see her brother even at all to-night; then ride on to The Naroway and give these few lines which I have pencilled to Mrs. Whinnipeg. Ride round to the back door, or leave the horse at the gate and walk. Give them to her quietly. I wish you not to be either seen or heard by Mr. Bartle; he is not well, and the shock which this news would give might do him harm. Do you understand?"

"Quite, miss. I'll do all."

When this last messenger was despatched Lorraine entered the house. What wonder that it wore this night an aspect which it had never worn for her before? It had lost its familiarity, for, when she reached the hall, she felt herself pause and wonder which way she should turn. To her aching ears there seemed a heavy knell in the hush that lay upon the place. To her aching eyes there seemed a heavy shadow hanging like a pall around her. As she crept up the stairs she found herself repeating again and again the news she had to tell, wondering whether the words were ordinary words, or were some weird echo she had caught. But when she entered the warm nursery, which she had so lately left, a great cold numbness fell upon her faculties, and she stood mentally lost, forgetting those words she had rehearsed, and gazing about her as if the scene were foreign, even terrible, to her. Was this the room where she had stood with Athol only an hour before, never dreaming of the tragedy which should make their lives, and the life of this little one, outcast and terrible under a secret burden? Was this the room? Was it this day? Was it her own life which had changed? Yes, her whole life, which could never be what it was before—not even what it was in the anguish of that afternoon parting five hours ago.

The firelight danced upon the gilded pink walls, and threw gliding shadows on the drawn curtains. In its glow Miss Shefford had been sitting beside Rourke's sleeping baby, but at sight of Lorraine she rose and came forward, the warm light still upon her pitying face.

"My dear," she cried, throwing her about the slender, trembling figure, "at is it? Where is—where is Mr. ham?"

hour before she and Athol had left ouse together. Yet now, though she back alone with this look upon her the old lady evidently did not think what had happened had happened to

ss Shefford's words called back the failing senses. Standing beside the where Rourke's baby still slept peace—after Athol's medicine, she told the ady what she had told the servants r; only, instead of the raised, clear, tened tones, she spoke now in an , broken whisper. And always after—s she could remember how, while she , the great turret-bell at Holve had k nine, and she had stopped to count ow and heavy strokes—one by one. en the tale was told, the two sat e the fire in silence, listening with t breathless eagerness, yet dreading ar the silence broken. And thus for the night dragged on, only broken hours by the heavy booming note of eat clock upon the hill at Holve.

CHAPTER XXII.

. THORNE's visiting was over for that ne firmly believed, when he sent his ham round to the yard and entered ghted hall. He was humming with a ed complacency. Though neither hed nor worn out he was in a condi—as he knew, most thoroughly to enjoy nner and his easy-chair. Just as the g-room bell warned the cook of her r's presence there, and readiness for up, another peal clanged through the

hat surgery-bell was made to stand a deal," muttered the physician," but ldn't answer for its standing many pulls as that. Confound it! But I ave a plate of soup, at least, before I I cannot stand less than that, though, ll may be to a dying duchess!" "Well, what is it?" he questioned

sharply, as his servant entered the room— "Who is ill, or fancying himself so?"

"It's Mr. Trenham, sir, and Mr. Newley killed."

"What!" The physician's smooth tones were actually discordant in their harshness.

"Who?"

"Mr. Trenham dead, sir, I understand, and Mr. Newley—ridden over in the Loop at Winterfield. And Dr. Vere has sent for you first, and the messenger has gone on to Atton for Dr. Meredith."

"Don't stand gaping there, then," interposed Dr. Thorne, excitedly; "you might have had the horses at the door by this time."

The dinner was untasted, when Dr. Thorne took again the seat in his brougham which he had so lately vacated, and ordered the steaming horses to be driven through the village at a pace unusual even with a physician's quadrupeds. Yet still the old physician from Atton was at the Loop as soon as he, for Lorraine's messenger had overtaken him upon the high road, and he had turned at once and taken the man's horse. He had just dismounted at the lodge when Dr. Thorne arrived, and so the two physicians walked together, in the deepening darkness, to the spot where Athol still kept his watch; Brent, who had waited for them at the gate, guiding them.

"I could not leave," Athol said, rising from his kneeling posture beside Rourke, and speaking in a tone of humble, anxious apology which surprised both listeners; "I had no one to assist me in carrying—them to The Lodge, because I was obliged to send Mr. Trenham's servant to the gate to await you. Now, at last, he is at liberty, and will fetch a hurdle and mattresses."

"Of course you have used every means for restoring consciousness?" said Dr. Thorne, importantly, as he lowered the light to Rourke's face.

"Not dead," asserted the Atton physician, with his fingers on Rourke's wrist. "Have you given him brandy, Dr. Vere?"

"Several times, but I grieve to say in vain. I have used other means, too, for I had my medicine-case with me."

There was something in Athol's words and manner which Dr. Thorne was study-

ing a little curiously; which he thought keenly over, even while he asked his next question.

"You look as if you had seen the accident, Dr. Vere. It must have been a most dangerous fall."

"When I reached this place," said Athol, a dusky red spreading over his face, which the darkness hid, "it was all over. Even Mr. Newley was lying lifeless as he is now—and he lies nearer Winterfield, proving his accident the latter one, as the horse was galloping homewards."

"Certainly not dead," pronounced Dr. Thorne, his hand within Rourke's waistcoat. "Now, allow us to examine the other patient."

"Here I have tried to restore consciousness still more hopelessly in vain," said Athol, standing still and cold when they had reached the spot where Horton Newley lay upon the drive, fifty paces nearer the farm.

"Doubtless," returned Dr. Thorne, curtly, as he stooped beside the upturned face, and moved the light to and fro above it; "for beyond a doubt *this* is death."

"How long will that man be?" inquired Dr. Meredith, anxiously peering through the darkness.

"Brent, I know, will be back as soon as any man could be," replied Athol; "and really here they are!"

Two hurdles and two mattresses the men brought, and the doctors placed the lifeless forms upon them, assisting them to bear them to The Lodge. "Only The Lodge at present," they all said.

"I wonder Vere did not try to get one of them there before," muttered Dr. Thorne to himself. "It seems just as if he had waited for us—which was most ridiculously unnecessary, and could serve no purpose at all."

They were passing among the trees before The Lodge door, in a darkness just then deep as death, and in another minute Miriam's warm little kitchen was filled. Here means were tried once more to restore animation to Rourke Trenham, while the physicians covered the upturned face of Horton Newley, knowing that no consciousness would ever return there.

The form lay sharp and rigid under its covering, as only a dead form ever lies; and old Dr. Meredith, looking sorrowfully down upon it, said some one should hasten on to Holve to prepare the dead man's sister for the sight. He would go, he added. But soon after he had left, it struck Dr. Thorne that it was he who ought to have borne these tidings, being the family physician at Holve. And so, without any hesitation, he left Athol watching beside his friend, and, promising to return in time for Rourke's removal, he drove through the park as fast as possible, to be in advance of the walkers.

Then Athol sat in the little kitchen alone with Rourke, as he lay in that unconsciousness which looked so terribly like death.

The firelight played upon the white, still face, and stroked the motionless hands; it lay caressingly upon the handsome, easy figure, which, in its life and restlessness, had always been so warmly welcomed on that hearth. A medicine-glass lay beside Athol's hand upon the table, but he never lowered it to Rourke's lips; never once offered it to the patient for whom it had been mixed, only held it to his own lips now and then.

And so Rourke lay on, and Athol—his own anxious face as white as that on which he gazed—sat beside him in the warm, bright light, pleading silently with Heaven both for himself and for this friend he loved so well.

Softly and cautiously the door of Miriam's chamber opened, and the old woman crept up to the hearth and knelt beside the mattress there, leaning with her weak, clasped hands upon a chair beside her, and looking down with piteous eagerness into Rourke Trenham's face.

"I knew it was comin'," she muttered, rocking slowly to and fro; "I've known it long; I've seen it in my dreams often and often, doctor. Couldn't I tell it was comin' when I saw that dreadful look upon his face which no one ever could bring to it but *him*—the man that stole his home? It wasn't common anger, doctor, it wasn't what he looked when he was angry with anybody but *him*. I believe it was somethin' he couldn't help, and I've

lain awake in the night, hours and hours at a time, thinkin' of it, and seeing it, and wonderin' if anybody would ever understand it. Did even *you* really understand it, doctor? And now all's come as I've dreamed it would, and the young master's lyin' here so low in my poor kitchen—by his own fault, maybe, doctor, in the sight of Heaven—by his own sin, some will say, p'raps; but I—but we know different, don't we, doctor? We know how hard the master tried to keep that devil off! We know—we know! Doctor," added Miriam, peering up into his face as if she tried to pierce a mist that hung between them, "will he wake again?"

"Yes," said Athol, simply, in his great earnestness.

"Thank God for that!" cried the old woman raising her feeble, clasped hands solemnly. "There is a life before him still, to live without *him* for ever in his way; a life that may be all different. Doctor, the prayer of a dyin' woman, though she's old and poor and weak, won't be despised in Heaven, will it?"

"No, Miriam."

Then the old woman covered her misty eyes with both her wasted hands, and for a few minutes there was silence in the room; while Athol leaned forward in his chair, and folded his hands unconsciously. He started to support Miriam when she raised her head again, for he saw that it was shaking with palsy.

"I suppose Rhoda is in your room waiting for you!" he asked, "as I have not seen her in the kitchen here."

"She is out," answered Miriam, absently, as if she hardly cared to follow a new thought. "She was frightened, I think, and went away. I don't mind. I don't want anythin'. I've no more wants, doctor—but one," she added, and the wistful smile of a little child dawned upon her wan, lined face, as she laid her hand humbly upon Rourke's. "I am glad to touch it once more," she whispered; "he often gave it to me in old times—often laid it on my shoulder in a way he had, and he often lent it me in help, just without seemin' to think he was helpin' me at all. A strong,

firm hand it was, though it could be as gentle as a girl's; brown, too—he never cared to keep them white—but *always* so sure on his bridle. I've heard everybody say it, doctor; many that *couldn't* make a mistake. Will they—will they ever believe that he was thrown at last;—*he!* doctor?" The failing voice had little need to fall to a whisper. "It's God that has to decide it, isn't it? He knows everythin' that went before, doesn't He?"

"He knows everything," replied Athol, soothingly.

Then Miriam stooped and touched her lips to the motionless hand, and Athol gently led her back to her own room. Before the morning dawned, she lay at rest in her quiet little room; all the long years of infirmity, and the last years of suffering, forgotten in that rest which remained for the patient, humble soul.

In his own room at Winterfield they laid Rourke Trenham, in that silent hush which rested on the house. Motionless, and almost breathless, with faded lips and a deathlike pallor on his face, with eyelids closed and still, as they are rarely still except in death, he lay until the weary hours of that long night had almost sped. Then there came a change—almost imperceptible; but a change which Athol—so intent and watchful—caught in a moment. The feeble pulse fluttered a little; Rourke's eyes opened wide upon Athol's face, then closed tremulously—almost as if in slumber now. Athol—moving his hand slowly while he kept his watching position beside the bed—took a small phial from his breast pocket. He dropped a few drops of the dark-colored fluid it contained upon a lump of sugar, and cautiously placed this between Rourke's lips. Then the sleep grew deep as death once more, and Rourke lay white and motionless again, in the still unconsciousness which looked so terribly like death.

When Athol left the room for the first time that morning he found Lorraine waiting in the hall, expecting him to come.

"I am going to The Narrowway," she said, as he took her cold hand into his close grasp, and rested his tired harassed

eyes upon her face, "now that I have seen you, Athol."

"I knew you would be going. No one can break this news to the old man so gently and so lovingly as you will, my darling."

"Not conscious yet?" questioned the girl, below her breath.

"No."

"Will he—will he recollect it at all, or—
or forget?"

"At first, I think he will forget. It may be gone from him even for ever. It may all come back."

"But not—not at first?" she whispered eagerly. "How long may it be, Athol?"

"Not until after—the inquest. Not until then—if God please," he answered, in a tone of such sorrowful, awed reverence that Lorraine from that moment shrank from letting him speak of this again.

As she left the house her father joined her, with that new tenderness in his voice and face which was so precious to her.

"Can you walk, dear? Are you not too weary after such a night?"

"I would a great deal rather walk, father," she said, linking her arm in his; "especially if you are coming."

"Only to the gate, dear. I cannot stay away from here, and—it will be better for you to go alone to Abram."

Through the Loop they walked in a pained silence, Lorraine shrinking to her father's side, and looking up into his face as if she dared not trust her eyes upon the ground. Yet could she fail to see where the gravel was scattered angrily by a horse's feet? The water of the lake hardly shimmered in its stillness; the deer seemed to have deserted the park on which—though glorious this morning in its young spring beauty—so black a shadow seemed to lie. Against the soft, grey sky the battlements of the darkened house stood in a dim and haunted grandeur, and Lorraine shuddered when she saw it, as if the death that reigned within had struck her with its icy touch.

"I will leave you now, dear," said Mr. Gaveston, when they reached the gate at The Narrowway. "It will be very hard for you, but you will not shrink from the task,

my child. The old man will bear it best from you, for you were always his favorite—next to Rourke."

"Oh! father," she cried, with a tearless sob, as she laid her face a moment on the gate in sudden cowardice, remembering not what she had to tell, but what had been the truth—"oh! father, must he be told?—must he know?"

"Do not leave until I come for you," said Mr. Gaveston, tenderly, unable though to answer her pleading question; "I cannot let you take this walk again. I will drive over for you, dear."

He looked after her as she walked wearily up the quaint familiar garden-path, and all the wasted tenderness of her lifetime was in his dim and longing eyes. She was his only one now, this fragile girl—fragile with all her pure brave-heartedness—and had he not forfeited all claim to a daughter's love from her? And the time was near when he was to lose her; and now he knew *what* he was to lose. From the doorway, Lorraine turned and smiled to see him waiting; a wan little smile, but it told how sweet to her was her father's care and cheered him with its memory on his return to Winterfield.

Abram Bartle was standing in the low, wainscoted hall when Lorraine entered it. Something in his attitude, and the waiting listening expression of his face, made her fancy he had heard her step and was looking for her; but when the waiting eyes went on beyond her, she knew for whom he had been listening.

"It is only I, Mr. Bartle," she said, wistfully; "only I."

"You, is it, Gipsy?" he said, with an effort at his old tone of cheery content, as he took both her hands in his, and tried to look her in the face as if the sight were all he longed for—and failing for the first time in his life—poor Abram! "I—I wasn't expecting anyone in particular, only whenever a fresh morning dawns I feel my boy may come."

"He—he generally used—he generally comes at odd unlikely times, doesn't he?" faltered Lorraine, her heart aching sorely as she led the old man into the parlor where they had spent so many gay and pleasant

hours together; "one never could tell when to expect Rourke."

"Unless one was *always* expecting him, Gipsy," said Abram, with a smile that told a story in itself, and made it all the harder and sadder for the girl to tell hers.

Sitting beside him, in the long spring-scented room, she told it, clinging to him with a love that vainly strove to make him see *less* than she told rather than more, and hiding all her own despair and fear and grief. It was the story she had told before—that story under which the truth lay hidden as yet—but the pain of telling was even tenfold to her what it had been before. And Abram Bartle listened to every word in a silence which frightened Lorraine more than any grieving or incredulous words could have done. But when her story was finished, and her words of hope exhausted, he turned slowly to meet her piteous gaze, and told her that she *lied*.

Coldly and stiffly he said it, again and again; his eyes—which had never looked at her before without the warmth of love behind them—scared and cold and sceptical. Again and again he said it, until the forced unnatural tones broke into a wail of unutterable pain, and a mist of merciful oblivion fell over the changed eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE coroner and jury had adjourned from the Trenham Arms, in Kumley, to Holve, to go through the ceremony they designated "viewing the body"; which consisted of their standing for two minutes round the bed where the dead man lay, and gazing with lugubrious indifference at the well-cut, rigid features of the ex-steward, who had labored so hard to be master here, where his rule could be known no longer. They had returned again, with an effort at sadness, to the Trenham Arms; and had taken their seats at the long polished table round which so many of them sat night after night in jovial conviviality. Grave enough now though; grave almost as the physician who gives the first evidence and shows with a calm conciseness how on his return from Winterfield on the

evening of the 28th he met the horse Mr. Trenham had been riding galloping towards home, the reins hanging loose and the saddle empty; how a few minutes afterwards he had seen deceased lying in the drive just as he lay when the other physicians came up; and how some fifty paces nearer The Lodge he had found Mr. Trenham thrown and unconscious; the unconsciousness evidently caused by his temple having been struck in the fall.

Lorraine Gaveston sat listening while this evidence was corroborated by the elder physicians. Sometimes there were whole sentences which she could not understand—sentences which seemed to her to be uttered in a foreign language; sometimes words, even single words, fell upon her ears like blows. Athol glancing now and then anxiously into her face, hardly wondered why its pain gave place at times to utter blankness, nor why her lovely, miserable eyes struggled from a great mental darkness.

"Then your opinion is that Mr. Trenham's horse threw him, and, on its homeward way, unchecked, rode over deceased and trampled him to death?"

That was, under the circumstances, the only opinion the physicians could form. Deceased had been crushed upon his chest by a horse's tread. Mr. Trenham had been violently thrown upon the temple. No blood had been spilt, and so the case was simple and incontrovertible.

"Miss Gaveston was in attendance," the coroner believed, "and had been present at the finding of the bodies. Would Miss Gaveston step forward?"

"*The evidence you give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.*"

Athol was standing close beside her while she was sworn, and saw how her white lips shivered, and were not allowed to touch the Book she held before her mouth.

"How were the bodies lying when you reached them?"

"They lay exactly as Dr. Meredith described them—that of Mr. Newley at least fifty paces nearer to Winterfield than that of Mr. Trenham."

"And you met the horse—where?"

"I saw the horse close to the Winterfield gate of the Loop; the—the bodies lay on the Hohve side."

No one noticed the slight change of form in the girl's answer; but everyone noticed the agony in her low voice; and a sign of pity, half admiration and half respect, stirred the whole room.

"This has shocked her terribly, poor child," one old gentleman whispered to his neighbor. "It was not a sight for any girl to stand unmoved; and then one was her brother-in-law and the other, if report speak true, her suitor!"

But the neighbor to whom this was addressed was little Sir Peter Vaughan, and he felt he had no reason to pity Lorraine Gaveston inasmuch as she had had no pity for him; so he muttered in answer that Trenham had an interest in Newley's death; and to him, Sir Peter, things wore a very suspicious aspect and he hoped they would be looked into.

The coroner's voice broke in upon this sentence.

"What horse was it you met?"

"The young thoroughbred called Vestris, which Mr. Trenham was fond of riding, but which we none of us liked to see him ride—a dangerous horse we all thought it. Miss Shefford was most anxious that evening and expressed to Dr. Vere and myself her fears for Mr. Trenham, especially as the horse had been for some weeks doing nothing."

"The grooms then, do not exercise her in his absence?"

"I believe not, except one servant, who was with his master in London during that time."

"The man who is to give his evidence, you mean?"

"Yes."

"And it was you, Miss Gaveston, was it not, who bore the tidings to Winterfield?"

"Yes, it was I."

"You left Dr. Vere striving to restore consciousness to Mr. Trenham?"

"Yes."

"Can you remember where this whiplay when you reached the spot?"

"I—I saw that whip beside Mr. Trenham's hand, just where he lay."

"And this hat? I am sorry to continue such an examination, Miss Gaveston, but it is painfully necessary."

"That hat is Mr. Newley's. I remember seeing it; it lay on the grass, I think, some few yards from his head."

"Did you not always consider Mr. Trenham a very skilful horseman?"

"Yes."

The simple word was freighted with a heavy fear.

"Then it must have surprised you greatly to meet his horse riderless?"

Old Doctor Meredith hurriedly whispered to the coroner and, with a murmured apology, this question was withdrawn.

"Will you go?" whispered Athol to her, eagerly, when she was released.

"No, I will stay. I—I suppose I had better stay," she answered back, in a tone of weariness that was yet shaken by a restless excitement.

So she took her seat again, and listened once more, with every eager power she possessed, while Brent was sworn and questioned.

She knew she had no fear for anything he might relate. No! not even if he knew—

Through a suggestion of Sir Peter Vaughan's, Rhoda Burke was summoned when Rourke's servant was dismissed. She cried a great deal while she answered the questions put to her, but grew important as she told how deceased had been to The Lodge that night; and how, when Andrew Brent came a few minutes afterwards, they had high words together; or at least Andrew had been very rude to Mr. Newley about her. Then Dr. Vere had called that very minute to see Miriam, and he had been very angry with Mr. Newley too; and they had gone out together. Mr. Newley was very quiet—he would not say one angry word—but Dr. Vere had gone out very angry—that was at dusk on the night of the 28th—and as soon as they had left she was frightened, and ran to Hohve for company.

That was the girl's story, and Lorraine—as she listened, knew by whom it had been prompted—knew it could not be contradicted, because of its deep substratum of truth—and knew what a taint of foul suspicion it would leave in many minds.

Again Brent was summoned to answer this charge, and Doctor Vere was requested to refute it if it were not true. But Athol said it *was* true, and that he had even been complaining of Mr. Newley to Miss Gaveston when they had met him lying dead. He could hardly say even now that he was sorry for those words. Under the same circumstances he should utter the same again.

Athol said it with a grave, honest indignation. The only respect he showed in speaking of the dead was that he brought no charge against him; would not even mention the uncalled-for and unexplained notice which, after the election, he had received to leave the cottage where his father had lived, and where he had, after hard work and many struggles, succeeded in establishing his practice. Not a word of this did he charge against Newley, not a word did he say of Newley's long enmity for him because of his friendship with Rourke Trenham; he only uttered this spontaneous frank admission of his feeling at the time he and Newley parted. And the very frankness of the speech disarmed it of all evil in the ears of most who heard.

Yes, Andrew Brent said, when interrogated on what Rhoda had told of that evening, yes, he and Mr. Newley had had what Rhoda called high words, and perhaps she herself had rightly told why. He always had hated Mr. Newley; no one of Mr. Trenham's servants could say anything else, knowing all he'd done and been since the late master's death at Hohve. He had felt angrier than usual against Mr. Newley that night; but it didn't matter to him where Mr. Newley chose to go after he left the Lodge. He, Brent, had gone to the church, at Dr. Vere's request, and waited there until service was over. On his way back to Winterfield, some half hour or more after that, he had seen his master lying senseless in the drive, having evidently been thrown from his horse. He had not thought of Mr. Newley then. He had thought of nothing but his own master. But Dr. Vere had sent him to The Lodge to direct the physicians. He had not seen Mr. Newley at all until he passed him on the way to Winterfield. Dr. Vere had been

walking backwards and forwards beside Mr. Trenham when he had joined him each time; both at first, when he had been sent back to The Lodge, and the second time when he had brought the doctors.

All this Andrew said with a quietness which was entirely new to him; and Lorraine, glancing at him, unconsciously betrayed a little of the feeling which filled her heart—closely akin to gratitude, if it were not actually so.

Again the placid-uttered suggestions of Sir Peter Vaughan breathed a faint suspicion, which was intangible and unassailable, yet none the more crushing for all that. Dr. Vere was Mr. Trenham's friend, he urged; and Mr. Trenham had a strong and powerful interest in the death of deceased. The last witness was Mr. Trenham's servant, a man who was known to be devoted to his master's interests to a degree that was, to say the least remarkable in a person of no refinement, and without any particular claim upon his master. Both these witnesses (strongly attached to a man who was known to hate and despise the deceased) had been heard wrangling with him within the hour of his death, as one might say. Did not the circumstance look, to say the least, extraordinary?

Perhaps Sir Peter fancied *he* was saying the least, and that the circumstances would look more than extraordinary as anyone else would put them. Whether he was right in the whole of the surmise or not, he was right in the half, and no one in the room failed to perceive the touch of suspicion with which his words were pointed. Lightest of all, though, did this suspicion rest on the two whom it most nearly touched, and who were glad to bear it, so that it might not rest one moment on any one else.

Sir Peter Vaughan sat moodily in his seat while the order was given to clear the room before the verdict. The story he had hoped to carry back to Horton Newley's sister was not proceeding quite so smoothly as he wished; still the suspicion was at work, and was still to work. The verdict was given at last—"Accidental death."

"It is over! It is all over, Athol! Let us go!" Lorraine said, her eyes burning

with excitement as she laid her hot, restless, fingers on his arm. "‘Accidental death’ they said, didn’t they, Athol? There was another verdict I feared. I—I—you know it, Athol—‘Died by the visitation of God.’ If they had——"

"Hush! my darling," he whispered, with infinite grief and tenderness. "Your words will be heard. Come with me."

"If they had decided it so," she said again, still with the suppressed, feverish excitement in her eyes and voice, "I—I—Athol, I think it would have killed me! I hope it would!—I hope it would!"

"My love," he said, again standing between her and the crowd, "if these words are heard our others were all in vain." But it was not because he feared their being heard that he silenced her, only because he feared this bewildered, broken expression of the pain she was suffering.

Never did Dr Vere forget the misery of that walk from the room where the inquest had been held to the carriage which waited at the door of the inn. It seemed to him that everyone stopped to speak to Lorraine—everyone with the same wish to sympathize, perhaps, but bringing the same misery to the face he loved.

All that day he fretted to see how she suffered, and at the same time defied her suffering. If she had laid down and closed her eyes in silence, he would have felt her weariness but natural; but to see her taking her old place, thoughtful for everyone but herself, nervously wishful to have everyone and everything gay and bright and pleasant in the house, and to cheer her father (and Athol, while he was with her) was a sight which he could hardly bear. For the restless brilliance of her eyes was an alarming brilliance, which he knew well; and he would rather have seen her cheeks colorless, as they had been before, than with that beautiful pink burning in them as it burned to-night.

All Athol’s tenderness and care she accepted with a humility which would have been sadly patient, but for its nervousness; and her father’s she seemed to take and hold with a nervous fear of its escaping her.

Lucilla Vere, who had attended the in-

quest, to be, if possible, a comfort to Lorraine, stayed with her still at home; not even needing Athol’s request to do so, as she might have done at other times. And when Dr. Vere left, as he did only to run back for a few minutes at a time from Rourke’s bedside, she tried her best—poor Lucilla!—to take his place.

And Lorraine accepted this care and love and sympathy with a strange, humble gratitude, but yet shrank from the slightest confidence with anyone; doubly shrank from Athol’s confidence. Though she was the brightest one among them—taking a feverish interest in everything—she seemed withal to stand alone among them, as she had never done before; with a new, strange, restless loneliness which all knew they could not break, while they wondered over it, only half comprehending.

Later on in the evening, when Athol had ridden over from Winterfield for a few minutes, in the effort both to set his mind at rest, if possible, by seeing Lorraine, and to tell of Rourke’s continued lethargy—Poor Athol! how hard this was to tell, each night and morning, after he had administered the opiate, only his own heart could know—Mr. Gaveston said he would return with him.

"I should have gone before, but that I have been so anxious about Lorraine," he said, detaining Dr. Vere in the hall. "Tell me exactly what you think of her, Athol?"

"Does she talk of going to The Narrows?" inquired Athol, his voice actually trembling in his anxiety.

"Yes, she has entreated me to let her go, but I am afraid."

"Let her go," said Dr. Vere with earnestness; "I have wanted that, and I expected it, as Mr. Bartle is unable to leave home. He will speak of it all, and speak of it as one who loves Rourke, and loves her, and this feverish, fictitious strength and brightness will break her down. There is only one thing from which I can hope a relief for her—that is, a fit of real, girlish crying. Let her go, please."

"Anything will be better than this," fretted Mr. Gaveston. "I will send her, of course, if you recommend it. Come,

he has been listening for your step so long."

So when Athol was ready to ride back to Winterfield to resume his watch, and Mr. Gaveston ready to accompany him, the rougham stood at the door at Rupert's rest, and Lorraine—still with the brilliance in her eyes, and the bright pink upon her cheeks—lingered in the hall, bidding her other good night, cheering Athol, and making arrangements for Miss Vere's comfort while she should be away. Then, softly kissing Lucilla's tearful face, and whispering how nice it would be to have her here when she returned, she went.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was the morning after the inquest, and Rourke Trenham had awakened to consciousness at last.

A most remarkable case, Dr. Meredith said. He could only recollect one other such in all the course of his practice, and that had excited great attention at the time.

It was an unusual case, Dr. Vere acknowledged—his voice was hurried and nervous little, but the old physician did not detect—he was afraid Mr. Trenham would be some time before he recovered from the effect of such a fall.

"You have continued pursuing the course of medicine we decided upon?"

"Yes," said Athol, his lips tightening little, his hand slipping from the chimney-piece, where Dr. Meredith's eyes rested, "and I have insured intense quietness, which, after all, is the thing most needed."

"Shall I call in again to-night, or not to-morrow?"

"To-night if you please," returned Dr. Vere, nervously.

"I will certainly. I only meant," the old physician warmly said, "that your own care and advice are so entirely sufficient that my returning to-day cannot be thought necessary. Still I will gladly come."

"It is the most peculiar case which has occurred within my memory," asserted Dr. Vere among his patients. "This is the first day of lethargy; but Vere can man-

age it alone, and, as I have been the physician of the late lamented Mr. Newley, of course my presence is a painful reminder to them all, both at Winterfield and Rupert's Rest."

Which was partly fact, of course, and partly fiction, as most of his hearers knew.

When Athol re-entered Trenham's room, after his conversation with Dr. Meredith, intense was his surprise to find Rourke half-dressed.

"What is this?" he cried. "Rourke, dear fellow, what do you mean by this?"

"By what?" asked Trenham, without turning, as he fumbled awkwardly with one of his sleeve-links; "by getting up at noon, do you mean, when I ought to have been up at sunrise. Is that old examiner gone?"

"Dr. Meredith?"

"Yes. What does he want here?—why did you let him into my room?"

Athol answered easily from his place upon the rug, looking steadily the while into Rourke's unquiet face—very steadily. "Dr. Meredith has been attending you—Dr. Meredith and I; even Thorne was called in at first, for you had a terrible fall, and the consequences might have been fatal—fatal. God help us that the thought is such an awful one!"

"Fatal!" repeated Rourke. "How do you mean?—that it might have killed me, or—"

"I mean," interposed Dr. Vere, turning his eyes from the young man's face, which was stirred, even in its pallor, by the old tempest of emotion, "that many men, who persist in riding as you ride, do meet their death in the darkness, as you might have met yours."

"In the darkness—pooh! It was light enough. Did I want more light?—did I need more light upon his craven face. I saw it plainly enough. I heard every word of his dastardly, cowardly insult. I—I held back at first, but he stood there defying me, Vere. I held back at first."

"I have only two minutes to stay, Rourke," put in Athol, in a tone which was new to his companion, who had not seen the change which had grown in him during these terrible days. "Will you go

to bed at once, or sit down here for five minutes and chat with me?"

"I will sit here. It is very--chilly, isn't it? Why should I go to bed? Why should you go away?"

"I must," returned Athol, pursuing the plan which he had felt would be the wisest.

"Sit down there, then, for the few minutes during which I can stay."

He put out his arm, and Rourke accepted its support unconsciously. Even then his step was feeble and uncertain, and he was glad to throw himself into the great easy-chair to which Athol had led him.

"Nice state of affairs," he said, a forced smile upon his lips, while his eyes were filled with a restless bewilderment; "I don't ever remember feeling so before, Vere. What is it? Does insanity take this form sometimes, and act upon the limbs and pulses?"

"Probably so," returned Athol, coolly, "such insanity as lurks in *you*, dear fellow."

"What did they do with him after that, Vere?" asked Trenham, raising himself in his seat and again fixing his eyes upon his companion with a sign of that hot light in their depths which Athol could never forget having once seen. "Tell me about it. I forget it all, only I saw your face and his—yours a living face, and his a dead one. There could be no mistaking that *his* was the dead face. I was looking at it—looking closely at it—when you woke me to-day—you and the old man who stared at me so hard. He knows all about it, of course?"

"Yes," said Athol, steadily meeting the uneasy gaze, "he knows you were thrown, and that Vestris trampled Newley to death afterwards."

"Afterwards! What does he mean?"

"He knows you have been troubled with terrible and unnatural dreams, dear fellow, as many men are who have been thrown upon the head; but beyond that he knows—as every one knows—the facts of the case. That you were thrown—do you understand Trenham, do you quite understand, old fellow?—and that Vestris galloped on, and trampled Newley to—to death. This was all explained, and proved upon the inquest yesterday"

"Inquest!" echoed Rourke, in a less whisper. "Proved upon the inquest? How?"

"Proved by the evidence," Athol answered, quietly. "I need not tell about it. It was like other inquest course. I have so many to attend to, I am tired of them."

"Vere," said Rourke, looking earnestly and questioningly into his friend's face, "could *you* be tempted to lie—even friend to whom you've always been so good?"

"The medical evidence—for Mr. May and Thorne were both on the spot when you were moved—was quite sufficient," said Athol, with a quiet effort at composure. "The facts were, as every one knows, acknowledged, incontrovertible."

"Then I have been dreaming, as you say, mad?"

"Dreaming certainly, whether or not," replied Athol, readily, because he knew there was truth in his words. "The medical men understand what dreamers usually attend—"

"And tell me," interrupted Trenham, holding his hand for a moment to his forehead as if to ease their aching, "did they understand—did no one understand—what was done?"

"Yes; we understood."

"But when I tell—"

"We want to hear nothing more," interrupted Athol, hastily. "If you rest the subject, Rourke, you will act as a man."

"You did not quite mean to say that, did you, Vere?" asked Rourke, when he saw the scarlet mount to his friend's face. "It was speaking too much home. It is not *my* evidence the one most needed."

"No; mine and Lor—"

Athol bit his lip, and checked himself in haste. The intense fear which Trenham's last speech had awakened in him had provoked the confession which he had never have uttered if he had given time to think.

Rourke had not risen, had not moved, at Athol's words, but a vivid color rushed to his face for one moment, then left it colorless as death.

"Your evidence and Lorraine's!" he faltered, his fingers tight upon the arms of his chair. "Your evidence and—whose, did you say?"

"Lorraine's," Athol answered, quietly, knowing now that it was best to attempt no reservation. "Lorraine and I were returning from Winterfield when you fell. We had been there to see little Rourke, who was not very well that night. Miss Shefford had grown anxious, and sent for me."

"And you were examined on your oath—you and she?"

"I and she—yes," returned Athol, as lightly as he could. "But we had only need to corroborate the evidence given by Meredith and Thorne."

"I do not understand," whispered Rourke, with the old action of his hand across his brows, as he turned his head wearily aside. "Athol, will you send Brent to help me to dress?"

"If you attempt to go out to-day you have a long illness in store, Rourke. If you rest quietly to-day you may be able to-morrow to do what you wish."

Athol spoke gravely—he could not conceal his own intense anxiety for what Rourke *might* do.

"Come Rourke lie down again, there's a good fellow. There is *nothing* to prevent your being well and active in a day or two, *if* you rest now."

"No—I will sit here. Go on your visits, Vere. I will sit here till you return to me—I promise it; and though I can do other—more horrible things—I cannot break my word to you. I—I think I shall be glad of the rest."

In the evening Athol returned to Winterfield to find this promise had been kept. Sitting opposite each other, the friends chatted, just a little as they had been used to chat together in the old times which seemed to both so far away; but Athol, not surprised to see how confused were Rourke's ideas, and how strong his desire still for sleep, took the talking on himself. He told of Lorraine, and all at Rupert's Rest; of Mr. Bartle and his faithful old sheep-dog; especially enlarged on Judith's care of old Abram. He told him of Miri-

am's death, withholding the date; and then of his own sister, with any little incidents or messages which he guessed would please the restless sick man. Then Rourke, owning at last to utter weariness, was glad to let his old friend help him into bed.

"If I must act the baby in the presence of any one Athol," he said, with a wistful sadness in his beautiful dark blue eyes, "I would rather it should be yours. But what good will bodily rest do me while my heart is burning like a fire in my side? What use is rest when it must come with solitude and memory?"

"Wait and see," Athol said, his kind eyes growing dim; "wait and try, Rourke." And though Rourke smiled incredulously, yet, when the time came, the solitude and memory were warded off by Athol's voluntary society.

"I have to make a call near here at dawn," he said, cheerily, as he settled himself on the couch in Rourke's room, "and so I billet myself upon you till then."

Of course Rourke understood the simple, thoughtful generosity of this act—he so keen always to recognise the good and generous—and he knew too from what fears and memories Athol saved him that night!

And in the morning Dr. Vere left him cheerfully. There was no need to fear any effect of that blow on his temple. What was to be feared was the result of the tension of these long months, the awful remorse, so silent and so deep-seated; and the effect of the dangerous and terrible excitement of that one last day. But with rest and care, with freedom from harassing thought, and especially from all fatigue, Athol felt that recovery was certain.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE Easter morning dawned as fair a morning as the spring could see; and Lorraine Gaveston stood listening to the bells that summoned her to the glad service of the Easter Day. The feverish restlessness had left her eyes now; the hectic burned no longer in her cheeks. Whether the fit of

girlish crying which Athol wished for her had done her this good, or whether it was her long talk with Abram, and the great trust and patience which he taught her, none could tell; but certain it is that upon her face this morning rested a wonderful, sweet calm.

"My God," she whispered, very softly, raising her folded hands against the pane, and leaning her head upon them there in the fair Easter sunshine, "hast Thou pardoned me that falsehood, for which I have, every night and day—every hour—begged Thy forgiveness? I feel Thou wilt, O God; I feel Thou hast, and all my heart is full of gratitude. If the prayer I pray is not a wrong and selfish prayer, O God, I do so long to have it answered—I am not patient and trustful—I long to be *sure* that Thou wilt pardon. Make me feel it as I kneel at Thy table to-day! I long—I long to feel Thou wilt forgive Rourke, and restore him to health, and be merciful to him always. I long to feel that his boy—Unn's boy—will grow up to love Thee and to fear Thee; I pray that his manhood shall be pure and brave—even if tried, my God, as his father's has been. And I long to feel that I am not doing wrong in leaving my father alone; that Athol shall be happy when he has only me; and that I may never cramp his kind and generous heart. O God, how I long to know I am forgiven! It is not impossible to me to pray now, my God, as it has been; so I can hope that Thou art helping me, and I can pray with all my heart, as I do now, that Thou wilt let me feel this to-day in Thy Sacrament. Forgive me, O my Father, if this prayer is too presuming!"

When Lorraine raised her head, a deep and steadfast trust was in her eyes, and a sweet calm upon her lips.

She and her father walked to church together in the Easter sunshine. Athol had said he would join them if he could, but neither was surprised when the hour of service drew near and he did not come.

"We shall kneel side by side, father," Lorraine whispered. "Athol and I shall be together for many a Sunday to come, but not you and I."

So, side by side, kneeling closely side by side, the father and daughter waited at altar to take their part in the glad ritual.

Ever since that horrible night in Loop she had shrunk timidly from me Mr. Spencer, not knowing what he had never seen. But now even that haunting feeling was lost in pure, far-away thought for he came to her as God's messenger telling her that forgiveness was possible even for that lie; that even *she* might have the sweet and comforting communion offered this day.

There were a few present that morning who noticed the beautiful, rapt face of the girl, raised as Mr. Spencer gave the sign into her father's hand; raised expectantly for to her it would be offered next. These few, one minute afterwards, saw the young head droop in a dreadful, bewildering manner; for the curate had put her by as if she had no place in his congregation—passed her by, for all the world as if she had no place in his congregation—looked in her calm eyes, and the rapt, dreamy smile upon her parted lips. Low her beautiful head upon the folded arms.

This was the end! This was the Feast of the Passover in which her heart had rejoiced at dawn, and in which she had dreamed that God would let her join and feel herself pardoned. And—and how long was it that she had stood listening to the tolling bells, and feeling how deeply and how long she could join in the service of this holy day? How long was it, and what had changed her so—for she *was* changed; she had been a hypocrite all the time; she was not worthy of a place at this holy table. She must have lied to God in that prayer. She must have mocked him when she came to kneel among His servants. The Body had not been given for *her*, then—the Blood had not been shed for *her*.

A bright, swift, lightning flash of thought came over her. Mr. Spencer might have overlooked her. It would surely be so. He could not have intended this. Alas! even if he knew! Ah! no, he could not put himself in his Master's place and show his Master's mercy!

Waiting, almost breathless in heart and lowliness, she listened while the

was given. To her father at last ; then it seemed to Lorraine that her pulses all stood still, and her heart grew chill as death.

The cup had passed to other hands without touching hers. Her hands and lips had once more been deemed unworthy. Strangely, slowly, the thought shaped itself to her, as if a far-off whisper crept nearer and nearer to her ear, growing gradually louder and more distinct, until it seemed roaring round her like the angry rushing of the sea. The worshippers about the altar rails—the church itself—the—yes, the whole world—seemed drifting from her !

Was it sleep or death that was coming over her, closing her in, separating her from all these happy people who were allowed to share the Supper of their Lord—from all the world ?

A timid, frightened, desperate grasp she made at the life that was leaving her.

"Father," she whispered, clinging to his arm with both her hot, unsteady hands, "take me away."

The tone of that low cry, and the pleading anguish of the young, white face were for years remembered among the little solemn group ; and the curate himself (standing an instant with the cup raised) wondered whether there were not some confessions which it might be well to leave to the penitent and his God. Yet this act of his was what he knew to be right—this act over which he had spent long hours of solitary thought—this act which he felt that all good men would have done, even though it should pain them, as it had pained him this day.

"Even if so," he whispered to himself, striving to ease his own sore pang when he saw the girl's crushed face and trembling figure leave the church.

She tried to walk steadily beside her father, because he had not seen. She would not hurt him now by telling him, or by showing how broken and how weak she felt—she, who had fancied in the early morning that life might be good for her even yet, and that her Father in heaven had pardoned her, and called even her to His festival.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ABRAM BARTLE was looking from his parlor window out into the Easter sunshine. He had the old look of expectancy in his quiet eyes, yet they were not, as of old, fixed upon the garden gate, or the meadow bridle road ; nor did they linger on the spot where Rourke was wont to throw his signal. They rested on the beds of bright spring flowers below the window ; on the budding ash above the gate ; and, longest of all, far in the wide, calm blue beyond.

Yet, as I said, the old expectancy and hope were there ; and when at last, in the long hush which followed the dying of the Easter peal, Rourke Trenham came slowly and thoughtfully up the gravel path, Abram's hand went swiftly to his heart, as if its quickened beating hurt him.

"I knew Vere was keeping you forcibly at home, Uncle Bart," said Rourke, taking the old man's hand in his, and studying his face with grave anxiety, "so I could not resist coming—my old fault, you see. I *never* could resist coming here, could I?"

"Never, dear lad, when you ought to have been elsewhere, as to-day."

"I could not go there," the young man answered, simply. "A gulf of endless depth lies between—"

"Did Dr. Vere give you leave to be out at all, church or elsewhere?" asked Abram, interrupting him rather eagerly. "Did he say you were fit for it?"

"Not exactly," laughed Rourke, turning his worn, restless face from his uncle's scrutiny, "because I did not trouble him with the question. He has a patient in Atton who is very ill, and as soon as ever he was gone there, I, of course, came here."

"Of course, dear lad," assented Abram, gleefully, his proud affection for the moment overmastering every other feeling. "But sit down now in your old place. Why, Rourke, you never used—you and I never used to need any ceremony with each other."

"I'm less tired than thirsty, Uncle Bart," said Rourke, still standing at the window, his back against the sun-gemmed aspen. "May I have a draught of beer?"

"No, lad," the old man said, with one of his rare glimpses of quiet, fatherly authoritativeness; "not while you are in that heat. Why did you not ride?"

"I have no horse," said Trenham, coolly.

"No horse!" The farmer's voice was stirred by a hundred troubled thoughts.

"I shall never mount a horse again, Uncle Bart, as long as I live."

"There's a consistent fellow!" smiled Abram, with a pitiful effort to speak naturally, and make the remark a light and ordinary one. "You told me, the very last time we mentioned one of your mares, that you would never sell her as long as she lived, and that no one but yourself should ever mount her."

"Yes—that was Vestris." Rourke's tone was steady, and his words unbroken, but Abram saw the line between his eyes deepen with untold pain. "I shot her yesterday."

"How?"

The old man's breath was failing him a little, but it seemed more like old times to question Rourke on all he did. Ah! like old times!

"How?" echoed Rourke, with a short laugh. "I hardly know how, Uncle Bart. Brent led her—she came dancing out from her stable into the air and sunshine as if—one shot did it—one shot, and she threw up her head. How the sun blazed then! Just as it does to-day—with the power of a hundred fires!"

"Well done, Rourke!" smiled Abram again, with a strong effort over himself; "talking so of a March sun! I—I was wishing it had more power this very hour, as I sat here trying to feel its warmth and cheer. But you've had a walk, I know, dear lad, and that makes a difference."

"And you, Uncle Bart, have had no walks for days and days," said Rourke, with a regretful softening in his tone, as he laid one hand a moment on Abram's shoulder. "And you actually dreamed that I could keep away from you while you were not able to come to me?"

"No, I don't believe I ever dreamed it, Rourke," said Bartle, speaking softly in his great affection; "though I tried to

fancy I was sure of it. Still I wish you *had* stayed away. This is too beautiful and bright a day to be lonely to the old man; and to-morrow you would be better dear lad."

"To-morrow," echoed Rourke, pleasantly, "I shall be better, in any case—much better for being here now. I am going away now for half a minute."

Buried in thought the farmer sat until Rourke returned. Then he turned suddenly to question him.

"Did you go for the beer, Rourke?"

"Yes; I appealed to Judith, as you were so inexorable, and she gave me stout."

"What a pity! what a pity!" muttered Abram, fretfully. "Anything would have been better for you. Why did you do it, Rourke?"

"I could not bear the thirst," said Rourke, sitting down now beside the old man at the window. "It is like—but never mind it; no one could understand. I mean," he added, just for one swift second bringing a smile to his grave face, "that it is a very natural thirst after my hot walk."

"You used to be a thirsty little lad sometimes, I remember," said Abram, looking laughingly down into the young man's eyes, "when you had raced down here on the sly; eh, Rourke?"

"What grand times those were for me, Uncle Bart!" said Trenham; and from those words they fell into a long, pleasant talk of that life which lay as far behind the old man's tired steps as behind the young man's eager ones. But they never spoke of the days that bordered this one; and only at last, when their hearts were full of love and quietness in the memory of these times, did they speak of those which might lie beyond.

"I knew that I should live to see you back at Hohve, Rourke," Abram said; "I always knew it, even though I was an old man when it was taken from you."

No answer. Rourke was looking out into the sunshine, with a peculiar brightness in his eyes—not glittering, but a steady light far down.

"You will keep Winterfield, of course; it will be a beautiful adjunct to Hohve. I

has all come back to you, you see, lad—all, and I have saved to no purpose; at least, you see, I have fancied lately that my savings would be of use to you, Rourke; and now they will be unnecessary; nothing but a remembrance of old Abry. You look surprised, dear lad. You never guessed old Abry was a miser, did you? Why, ever since one long-ago day, when I stole you from your nurse and brought you in here, and you refused to go away when she called you, and gave me the firmest little grip I ever felt about my neck—yes, ever since that day, I can say I have been a miser, saving for my boy."

"A miser! So like a miser you are, dear old uncle!" Rourke said, his voice a little shaken as he met Bartle's dim, kind eyes. "You! think of it! For ever lavishing on *me* such wealth of every kind—not money alone, but help and love untold."

"I've been thinking this morning how little use it is to save in this world, Rourke; and I was wishing I had used it for you—for us—while we were poorer."

Trenham smiled.

"For *us*!" he said, but checked himself as if afraid of trusting the words. "Don't go on wishing or regretting, uncle; you did always what was wisest and kindest; and you would have used it for me then but for your fear—so natural a one—that I must needs grow poorer and poorer. I know you had this fear—you *knew* it must be so when you witnessed my extravagance."

"And now you are rich instead," rejoined Abram, hastily; "the richest man in the county. And you will make us soon forget that such a man as Horton Newley ever lived to—"

"Uncle Bart, don't speak of him, please."

"No, lad," said Abram, noting a new tone in Rourke's grave voice. "No; we will leave him now. He dared the vengeance which has overtaken him."

"Oh, hush!"

The words came from Rourke's lips, with a quick, indrawn breath that sounded almost like a cry.

A silence fell between the two men—a silence that was heavy with pain for both of them. It was Trenham who broke it at

last, speaking quickly, as he rose once more in the restlessness which had lain dormant under the old man's loving reception.

"Uncle Bart," he said, bending forward as he leaned against the window again with his back to the light, "do you think men are ever mad for a little time only, and—then sane again?"

"I dare say, lad," said Abram, the more uneasily from his lively effort to be at ease; "but what does that matter to you and me? It actually—actually," repeated the old man, nervously, "reminds me of that old joke of yours, that there is insanity in your family."

"Yes," replied Rourke, with a deep gravity; "and you used to say it took a wiser head than mine to separate insanity from sin. I wish I knew them apart now, Uncle Bart, *exactly*."

Abram looked up at him with keen, pained scrutiny, though he had felt the changes hours ago, when Rourke had come in first. The changes which, withal, still left the old expression of his winning face unaltered.

It was in the vain effort to bring back the quiet spirit of their first long talk that Abram began to question him of things which he thought could not pain or harass him.

"So the lodge at Winterfield has been shut up since Miriam's funeral, has it?"

"Yes."

"Where is the girl gone—your valet's little sweetheart?"

"Into Atton. Miss Vere has kindly apprenticed her to a dressmaker there."

"The doctor has, you mean, Rourke?"

"No, I really mean Miss Vere. She is quite different, Uncle Bart, from what she used to be. She has been most kind about Rhoda. It may have been at Athol's instigation, but that does not take the merit from her. The girl could not have been turned adrift into the world."

"But I thought she was to marry Brent."

"I hope not—I hope not," rejoined Rourke, with energy.

"I hope not too," muttered Abram—"I hope not too. He's too good a fellow for her; too staunch and faithful himself. But who would take her puzzles me. Of course you had to pay?"

"Of course. I always intended that. If I had not been able to do it now, I should have left it in my——"

"And now," put in Abram, rather hurriedly, in Rourke's sudden silence, "Andrew will marry the little Puritan from Rupert's Rest."

"Yes, that is what I hope," returned Rourke, a quick flush rising to his face, to die the next moment.

"How is the little boy, Rourke?"

"All right, thank you, Uncle Bart. He was to come here to-day."

"And was Gipsy looking better when you saw her last? For she was to come here to-day, too, and has not come."

"I have not seen her."

The tone was hurried and impatient—unlike Rourke altogether, Abram thought—and the young man rose as he spoke.

"Not going already—not going yet, dear lad?"

"I must, indeed;" and yet he lingered as he stood, with no unwillingness. "I have some writing to do this evening, Uncle Bart."

"Not *this* evening, surely? It's Sunday, Rourke."

"Yes, I don't forget," Rourke answered, with a smile that was tender and beautiful in spite of its sadness; "but I must do it to-night."

And yet he still lingered for long minutes, there where the slanting sun-rays touched him.

"You really cannot stay, then, Rourke?" pleaded the old man, feeling how rarely he had had to plead for this before. "This writing is important, you say?"

"Yes," Rourke answered, the color again mounting slowly into his restless face, "I must have it done to-night, Uncle Bart."

And still he lingered; and because Judith brought in the tea just then they two took it together, as they had taken it a hundred times before. But Abram noticed that Rourke, though he drank eagerly, made but a failure of his attempt at eating. Then again the young man stood up to go, and took his uncle's hand in his. The close hand-grasp was his real adieu, and the silence had been unbroken by any parting

words when an unusual, prolonged noise filled the quiet room.

"Why, uncle," laughed Rourke, "you actually look scared. It's only the old Dutchman striking himself down. Listen—he is racing on into the hundreds!"

"I know—I know," faltered the old man, his lips growing white, while he fixed his eyes upon the old-fashioned clock which hung in a corner of the long room. "I don't like it, Rourke. I wish we had not heard it just now. It never struck itself down before, except on the night my poor wife died. It's a warning, Rourke—a warning, sent to me, dear lad. But wish you had been gone."

"A presage of death, is it?" questioned Rourke, softly, as he looked up at the quaint old timekeeper, with a gentle smile in his eyes. "I never suspected it held such power of prophecy. Whose death does it foreshadow now?"

"I know—I know," murmured the old man, with the same suppressed eagerness. "I am glad of the warning Rourke, for it comes to me—to me—to me; do you see dear lad? It is well to be warned, though have long been looking for death as a friend who is to meet me; a friend whom I look for afresh every morning, and lie down at night expecting. You don't even yet know why, Rourke; for I would not let them tell you. You had troubles enough of your own, dear boy, without bearing old Abry's. But I've had the touch of death upon my heart for years; and when the word is spoken for its grip to be a little closer, then all is over; all the worry and the suffering, I mean, dear lad. For other things—why, their best part will only then begin."

"But, uncle," urged Rourke, tenderly, "you do not really mean to say you consider this a supernatural warning? Of course the cord broke."

"No, no," whispered Abram, shaking his head slowly, "the weight did not fall. It did not fall before—I remember it well. I—I knew it was a warning then, and—I knew it would come again."

"It was not for yourself then, Uncle Bart," said Trenham, gravely; "it will not be for yourself now."

"Hush! lad," interposed Abram, with hurried nervousness. "Have I not long felt the pins falling gradually from the tabernacle? Am I not tired and old? Is it not time?"

A consciousness filled Trenham's mind that these words were so eagerly uttered and urged for a special purpose; a consciousness which won from him a question that was hard to ask.

"I thought you were to see me back in the old place, Uncle Bart?"

"Rourke—Rourke," the old man's trembling hands were laid on Rourke's, and his dim eyes were piteous in their childlike pleading, "don't speak so of going back. You say it coldly and proudly. Talk of it as you used to talk of it; pleased and gratefully, as you would have done before. Ah! dear lad, don't show yourself so changed; you who are to be master now in your father's house, and whose son is to reign there after you. Rourke, look into my eyes before you go—my old, failing eyes—and make them glad with your gladness; as you've often and often done when you've not had the cause you have this day."

"I think, Uncle Bart," said the young man, softly, laying both his hands on his uncle's shoulders, and looking into his face with a smile of love most steadfast, "that, in spite of the old Dutchman's rumbling, you will see—will see—even my son in his father's place. There, my prophecy is the better one."

When Rourke left the parlor this smile still haunted Abram, and gave the words a meaning which he hardly comprehended.

"Good-bye, Judith," said Rourke, offering her his hand as he passed slowly through the kitchen—"good-bye—take good care of your master."

"Going so early, sir—and surely not to walk?" exclaimed Mrs. Whinnipeg, in her astonishment. "I'm sure Dr. Vere would be angry. But stop till I get you some water, please sir. Your face is soiled—quite dirty, one may say, sir, under the eyes. You've been handling something that stains, and then rubbing your eyes. I won't be one minute."

She brought the water and towel, and

Rourke, laughing a little, washed his face "Not that I expect," he said lightly "to meet any one between here and home who will either know or care whether my face is clean or not. But certainly one would prefer its being so. There, is that all right, Judith?"

Judith gazed astonished.

"It's not much better, sir, if any. I will get warmer water."

"Oh! never mind," said Rourke, running his fingers through his dishevelled hair, "it shall do now, Judith. We shall have my uncle out here if he hears us; and he is very tired. Good-bye again."

"I wish, for the master's sake, you could have stayed to supper, sir."

"I wish so too; but I must be busy at home to-night."

When Rourke entered the hall at Winterfield it happened that Miss Shefford was crossing it with little Rourke in her arms. To her great delight, and no less to her surprise—for it was but very rarely that she saw Mr. Trenham caress his child—he took him now into his easy, close embrace. For a few minutes he and Miss Shefford stood talking where they had met. She noticed how tenderly he laid his boy's flushed, happy face against his own; but she noticed also that he never once offered to kiss it, and she wondered over this, knowing nothing of that last kiss of his.

"Una was quite right, Mr. Trenham," she said, smiling as she gazed from the father's handsome head to the little curly one upon his shoulder, "baby is growing more like you every day."

Rourke took the little head from its resting-place with a sigh, gave the child gently back into the old lady's arms, and turned away.

"Mr. Trenham," she said, anxiously, "you will rest now? It was a most daring thing for you to go out. Dr. Vere will be so displeased; and I have been terribly alarmed for you. I can see that you are suffering acutely; and there are such dreadful shadows under your eyes."

"Are there?" he said, smiling. "But no one will see me. I'm going to my own room to write. I have dined, and shall want nothing more to-night. In case I do not

finish in time to return to you, let me bid you good night now."

He shook her hand warmly, gave the child a last, light touch upon the hair (which from his hand was a caress), and then walked on up the stairs—slowly and very tiredly, she thought.

A little later, Athol called, and was told by Brent of his master's having been out all the afternoon.

"Since he came in he has been writing in his own room, sir," the man added, anxiously, "and has taken nothing. I carried up a tray, but he didn't seem inclined to be disturbed."

Dr. Vere had no hesitation about disturbing him. He went at once to Rourke's room, and blamed him hotly for his careless disregard of orders.

"I can never trust you again, Trenham," he said, speaking angrily in his real grief. "If you had really rested for these few days, instead of being a thousand times more restless than ever, you would have been well and strong now. I never can trust you again."

"Never mind 'again,' replied Rourke, quietly, raising his head and putting down his pen. "Such a case may never occur again. I am very glad I went, Vere."

"You are?—Why, Rourke," exclaimed Athol, taken off his guard, "what has happened to your face?"

"Not very clean, eh?" inquired Trenham, drawing his hand across his forehead. "So I have been told before to-day. A very humiliating piece of information, Vere."

"Rourke, dear fellow, turn away from that desk. Leave your letters for another day. Are you suffering?"

"No—not all the time at least. Now and then something gives me a grip. I don't feel very brisk, as one may say, but that is all. I'm all right while I sit quietly here. Not ill, you know."

"How I wish you had stayed here quietly all day, and not been mad enough to walk to The Narrowway; and what did you take?"

"It was very hot," said Rourke, wearily.

"What did you drink when you got there, hot and ill?"

"I had a glass of stout, as I have had before, in defiance of your orders. How can I help it? The thirst is unbearable."

"Madness! Why on earth did I leave you?" chafed Athol, rising and pacing restlessly the long, quiet room.

"Because you had a patient at a distance who needed you," put in Trenham, seriously, "and none here. Come, Athol, sit down, old fellow. Though not as a patient, I *do* need you. Come, my letters can be finished by-and-by."

A silence fell between them as they sat opposite each other—a silence which Dr. Vere broke at last, speaking as if he finished aloud a thought which haunted him.

"Rourke, may I bring Lorraine to see you?"

"No, no," Rourke answered, with a strong shuddering of his whole frame—"do not even *talk* of her to-night. Talk of Una, or—Have you been to church to-day, Athol?"

"Yes, I went in on my return. Even if I have only a few minutes, I like to go in when I can."

"Yes, I thought so," Rourke answered, very low. "Tell me what Mr. Spencer told you."

"He told me much," said Athol, speaking very gently and anxiously, "preaching from those few words in St. John, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.'"

"What is it?" questioned Rourke, turning his eyes fully to his friend's face, and asking the question simply, as if he could not grasp the meaning of the words.

Athol repeated them reverently, while Rourke, leaning forward in his seat, listened with drawn breath. Then he spoke with an impatience which was full of pain.

"Impossible! Impossible for Him to take away all our sins!—why should He?—what claim have we on Him?"

"None," replied Athol, gravely; "but He does it, Rourke. I should often and often feel crushed to utter despair by my sins, but for knowing that He does and will take them away; that He bears them for me."

"What were those first words?" asked Rourke, still with the great, deep questioning in his eyes. "Say them exactly—no others. I have no sense to follow others. Is He so plenteous in mercy for *that* to be true in all cases. I suppose—long ago I believed it—was sure of it, as one is sure of a thing before one has learnt to doubt. How different it is, Athol, *after* one's doubt has eaten into one's heart, and *after* the worst sin of all has left its awful stain. But say the verse again—will you. Your voice makes it like a real message to me."

Not only the verse did Athol repeat, but much, too, of the sermon he had heard; using his own simple language, and making the words as unlike a sermon as his kind words ever were. Rourke's eyes, as he listened, were fixed upon the fire which burned ruddily before them; but when Athol ceased, he suddenly stretched out both his hands with an impetuous longing.

"Oh, Athol!" he cried, "if I could have that one night again—just that one night! If it were not for the sin of that one night, I could believe those words—those good words."

"They are true; why doubt them in any case, Rourke?" said Athol, anxiously.

"They are all the more precious to us because of our sins. It is not *certain* sins He taketh away, you know; it is all sin."

"Did Spencer really say so?" asked Rourke. "I—I could almost wish I had heard him. I hovered about the door—not for long though; I thought he would be ashamed by seeing me there. Because"—Rourke's voice was low and shaken now, and his hot, weak hands were clasped upon his knee—"as I rode into the Loop that night, Spencer went into The Lodge. And he—he who would not lie for the world—let that evidence pass at the inquest. Athol, I used to think his was a strict and even unjust religion, just because it differed from Uncle Bart's simple creed; but—but I wish I had listened oftener. I wish I had heard him telling of the Lamb of God really taking away—what is it?—say it again. My brain is unsteady, and I can hardly repeat even that little verse. But it is good to have it to think of with that always-present memory of my own crime. If

I may believe those words, then that prayer which never ceases in my heart *may* rise to Heaven at last. But dare I believe them, Athol? Were they said of such sins as mine?"

"You will like to see Spencer now, Rourke?" began Athol, presently.

"Yes, I shall like to see him, but I do not think he will come. I should like to take his hand and tell him it was my own fault that his teaching was too hard for me, for it was always good. But he would refuse to come—he would refuse," repeated Trenham, with the hot flush burning in his face, and his eyes darkening to pain; "for he saw."

And then, though Athol did all he could to prevent it, there fell an utter silence between the two young men; for the thoughts of each had flown back to that scene burned in upon their brains.

It was Rourke who broke this silence, speaking now with a strong effort, which he strove in vain to hide.

"Athol, I want to finish my letters, and you ought to go to Lorraine. Don't look astonished. Mr. Gaveston has told me of your engagement. I knew why you did not wish to do so until—until I was all right again. I ought to have had the courage to speak of it before, but I could not. I don't know that I can—even now. Athol, dear old fellow, don't be hurt because I cannot say what I ought to say. I ought to wish you happiness, but what need? I ought to say I am glad, but I have *not* been glad—I am not glad now, I fear—but I shall be. I seem now as if I had always known it would be so, and yet—and yet the truth came as a thunderclap—a shock that left me, for a few moments, deaf and blind. I hear the same words now, if I chance to fall asleep, and I feel it all over again. I have so loved her. I have loved her—I was going to say as men do not often love—but what do I know about the loves of other men?—except that I *hope* they do not love as I do. If I could have my life over again—but I should only waste it again. Athol, tell her some day what I tell you now: that I could not have loved her better if she had listened to and answered all my wild and passionate prayers. And, Athol

one more word. If you ever have the training and teaching of a boy—the guardianship of one who is to be a man one day, and to take a man's part in the world—you will remember *my* life—my broken, wasted life—and it will help you. But what am I saying? What fear is there for any child taught by you and Lorraine—you—and—Lorraine?"

"I cannot even go to her to-night," said Athol, not trusting himself to look upon the suffering weariness of Rourke's face; "I would rather stay here."

"No; please go," pleaded Trenham, with real anxiety. "I must sit with you and talk to you if you are here, and I want to write a little longer. I am—am almost well now, Athol, and shall sleep to-night. You will come back in the morning. I shall be looking for you as soon as the day dawns, for I always feel so lonely now when you leave me, Athol; a weak, unmanly fellow, eh? Thank you for coming again to-night. Thank you for your life-long kindness—and help—and friendship. Good night, dear fellow."

"Any message for Mr. Gaveston or Lorraine?" inquired Athol, not trusting himself to say more, as he saw, with infinite pain, how Rourke struggled to make light of his acute suffering.

"No, none," returned Rourke, steadily; "no message to Lorraine—yet. She told me all she wished to say, and I remember. Why should I hurt her ever again? Good night, Athol."

At Rupert's Rest a sad discovery awaited Doctor Vere. The illness, so passionately fought against, had overtaken Lorraine at last. The agony of that morning had broken down the failing strength, and Dr. Vere's practised eye saw this at once. Yet she was sitting with her father, bright and gentle as of old, defying, as it were, the fever in her veins, and the weakness in her limbs; suffering it in silence (as she had suffered that morning's bitter pang) to spare the pain to others.

But the tired girl knew what a mental relief and rest it was to her when Athol took the responsibility from her. In the kindest, tenderest manner, but with the full authority of his profession, though his

heart seemed breaking, he sent her to bed, prescribed for her, and forbade her father even to enter the room, knowing, as he did, how unselfish a part the girl would play before him, whatever the cost to herself.

Then he sent for Lucilla, to take her share of watching—a part he could leave to her now in all trust and confidence—and leaving orders with Joan, which he knew would be scrupulously obeyed, in spite of the girl's fast-flowing tears, he left the house at last, in the calm, sweet sunrise which followed this sad, heavy night.

The master had gone to his own room soon after midnight, Brent said, as he noiselessly let Doctor Vere into the silent house. He had been writing or sitting before the fire until then. He, Brent, had gone in again and again to persuade him to go to bed, but he had only said there was plenty of time, and just chatted a bit kindly. Brent had been up all night, expecting Dr. Vere.

Softly the young physician entered Rourke's bedroom. Though the morning sun shone fair and bright without, he had expected the room to be in darkness; so, for a moment, the light dazzled him, and made him pause.

The curtain of one low window near the bed had been drawn aside, and the shutters thrown open; so the morning sunshine richly streamed into the room when Athol stood beside the bed, opposite this window, and looked down.

"Rourke," he whispered, softly; and as he spoke he laid his gentle hand upon the tossed hair. "I am come back."

No answer; and Athol bent a little lower. Man as he was he could not help but touch with his own the lips that were quivering and parted under the brown moustache.

"Dear fellow, do you remember? 'He taketh away the sins of the world'?"

The whisper reached the tired brain. The weak lips moved with a faint and wondering smile.

"I remember—Athol—my sins too. have—remembered—"

He had remembered. Was this all?

The warm, pitying sunshine lay upon Rourke's face, so still and calm at last.

Out afar, in the fathomless blue, the beautiful dying eyes were fixed. All suffering was over now; the look of keen and restless agony was gone. Even Athol had not felt it could be so soon as this that the sharp pain would cease, and the waiting time would come. Even he had not guessed how quickly sorrow, remorse, and weariness could bring the end. Kneeling beside this friend he loved so dearly, he whispered words of hope and prayer and comfort, while God's sunshine streamed in upon the watcher and the watched. And thus at last the end came, and Athol raised his hand and softly closed the dark blue eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE faded hatchment above the chief entrance at Hohve—as old as the great cannon below it—proclaimed to all whom it might, or might not, concern, that the head of the house was dead, and that the usual formula of *post-mortem* honors were to be paid him now. Yes, even though the people might resent a little sullenly the difference between this death and the legitimate, pompous, solemn, bed-surrounded demise of the head of a great house. Had not the last squire chosen to die without due warning? not even in the castle where his fathers had breathed their last before him; not even having his friends and servants about his bed, and his clergyman and lawyer in attendance; not in any way as it befitted a Trenham to die. Would any previous Trenham have let the country be shaken suddenly by the news of a young man's death only a day or two after he had been seen walking at a distance from home? Certainly not any Trenham whose mortuary behavior had been worthy of his name; and the people of course resented this.

And yet the funeral escutcheon had been put up by hands that stopped in their work again and again to wipe the mist from eyes that looked upon it. The church in the park was draped with black in a heavy silence; and over all the neighborhood hung a gloom which never before had a squire's death evoked. All hearts were

heavy in the solemn, funeral throng; yet this same subtle sense of injury betrayed itself. The fact was that few, either among the high or the low, had not some pleasant memory of Rourke Trenham; yet, looking back, they felt that, if they could have foretold this sudden early ending to the harassed life, they would have been kinder, warmer—different, perhaps, altogether in their conduct to him.

And so it was that below the unfeigned grief ran this subtle vein of something akin to remorse, and gave the grief an air of sullenness.

Athol Vere, passing from the darkened house in the evening quietness, felt nothing of this. In *his* sorrow he was wondering whether any Trenham in the far back years had died as Rourke had died—in the old farm there beyond the Loop, with only one old friend beside his bed; no tears, no last messages; no sorrowing friends lingering for tidings beyond the chamber-door; no eager messengers waiting for bulletins; no prayers offered up for the spirit that was on its way to judgment.

Athol, in his mourning dress, deep as if he mourned a brother—tilted his hat low over his eyes as he mounted the steps at Rupert's Rest, for at one of the low windows he could see Lorraine, and his eyes should not be clouded and tearful to meet hers.

As he entered the room, she turned to greet him with a smile—her own pretty smile it was, though the old brilliance of her beauty had paled, and the tall, rounded form was frail and willowy.

"My love," he whispered, with a clinging kiss upon the low, white forehead, "is not this a balmy April evening? I fancied I should find you up and here."

"Yes," she answered, with the great, deep calm which now seemed to belong to her, as her old, bright, varying moods had done; "not because of the April balminess, Athol, but because I longed to see you. I always long for you now—when you are away."

And then he knew that, though his love might only be, as she had said, a rest to her, it was a rest which grew always sweeter.

"It has all been very quiet to-day," he said, as he sat beside the chair in which she lay, "very genuine and truthful; just what he would have wished. There was nothing that would have vexed him, and nothing he would have despised."

"Athol, this evening, when the strangers are gone from Hohve, and it is quiet, will you take me to the church?"

Tenderly, yearningly, he gazed at her. The delicate, straight eyebrows, and the marvellous clearness of her eyes, gave her face still the peculiar look of child-like purity which had always belonged to it, and this was now heightened by its extreme delicacy. Could he take her over that cruel ground again, he thought, bitterly, and bring that horror to her face which he had seen before? It would be the old ground, step by step—in the dusk, too—and they two together, just as then. Take her so to Rourke's grave, and she so frail and white? Ah, no!

"To-morrow, dear one," he answered, stroking back her soft, dark hair. "The—the strangers will not all be gone to night, and we shall not be sure of being alone. Shall I tell you of Rourke's will?"

"Yes," she said, with a quick, checked drawing of her breath, "yes—tell me."

And so Athol, sitting beside her, and holding her weak, white hand in his, told of the will which Rourke had made on that Sunday night.

"I think," said Athol, "he had determined to write it without any legal forms and complications. It seems to me that he avoided them, remembering that horrible reading of his step-mother's will. Yet it is quite straightforward and correct; and the signatures—though only those of his servants—are all that is necessary. To them—to his servants, Lorraine—he has been as generous as he always was. This will shows him in no new character, it sounded to me just as if Rourke himself were speaking. He wishes all the old servants who went with him to Winterfield to be kept on at Hohve—none of those who stayed with Newley—and he leaves a gift to each of them by name. To Brent he leaves The Lodge at Winterfield for his life, at the same time wishing him to remain in the service

of his son; his wages to be doubled on his marriage. To Miss Shefford he bequeaths an annuity of £200; and to Lucilla, The Cottage—our old home—from which Newley turned me so scornfully."

Lorraine raised her eyes, appealing to him to stop.

"To me, my darling," he went on, laying her head upon his shoulder, that their eyes might not meet, for the pain of hers was deepening and deepening as he spoke, and his own were growing dim, "to you and me—though he only says to me—Rourke leaves The Priory. Lorraine, oh! my beloved, it made a coward of me when I heard it—it makes a coward of me now. To Horton Newley's sister," continued Athol, checking himself, as if he dared not linger yet on this, because he knew so well the thoughts which prompted the gift to himself and to Lorraine, "he bequeaths the Hohve rentals for the coming year. I wondered over this at first, but not now."

"No, no," Lorraine said, breathlessly; but he could not see her face.

"For you, my pet," Athol's voice was broken now, "he left that letter only, and the ring it contains. I know the history of that ring. It was his mother's—his own mother's—and no one else had worn it, not even Una. He told me once, a year ago, that it would fit you; and I knew, even then, with what a pain he said it. It cannot but fit you now, dearest, tiny as it is." Again he checked himself. "Have I told you all now?"

"No," she whispered, with a tearless quietness in her voice—"tell me more about his boy."

"The letter will tell you, dear, all that I cannot," he answered; and she saw how hard it was for him to speak of this. "The trustees and executors are his grandfather and Abram Bartle and myself; but his personal guardians are only you and myself. God help us in our trust!"

No word did she say; but her hands were tightly clasped as she looked up into the wide, calm heaven above that darkened house upon the hill.

"I will go and see your father now, Lorraine," said Athol. And then he gave her the letter Rourke had written on that Sun-

day night, in the great suffering which he had known must herald death.

She knew that Athol went because he guessed she would like to be alone to read it, and she thanked him in her heart.

Again and again, when he had left her alone, did she try in vain to read. The sight of the familiar writing brought a pain to her eyes more blinding far than tears. Holding her head in both her trembling hands she still could not ease this throbbing pain, though presently the words grew clear before her eyes, and their meaning reached her heart.

There was no mention in Rourke's letter of his love for her. He had said he would not pain her by its story again; and, though he felt the end so near, he had neither forgotten nor broken that one resolve. And yet, throughout the letter—so sadly tender, so patiently hopeless—that deep, engrossing love of his, which she so well understood, spoke to her as if in his own tones—only not passion-stirred as those tones had always been to her. Ah, so different! So calm were the words he had written on that Easter evening!

When she put the letter tenderly away at last, and tried to think what Rourke had wished, she could but recall the one request to her and Athol to love and guard his boy. This was all she could tell her father of Rourke's letter, and yet to her it had told so much!

When Athol came back she had risen from her seat, and was standing at the window, resting her head against the glass. Just in the spot where she had stood when Rourke had come in to her with his last, vain prayer, and just in the same attitude, though the feverish misery of that day was gone, and this sorrow was very still and quiet.

"You see what trust he leaves to us, Lorraine—to you and me," said Athol, as he came up and put his arms about her; for the slender figure leaned now really for support against the window-frame. "O my darling, may God give us power to fulfil the trust!"

"There is no word," Lorraine said, touching the letter softly, "of the loneliness and neglect of his childhood; or the

lovelessness of his youth; but in every line there breathes a craving for love and care and sympathy for his son, and confidence that he will win a father's and a mother's care from us. Oh, Athol, I will try so hard!"

Steadily, though very slowly, Lorraine crept back to health and strength once more; and the time drew nearer and nearer for her marriage. She never spoke of delaying it, for she knew how long Athol had waited for her; nor had she even need to tell her wish for the wedding to be a private one. She knew that would be arranged for her, just as if she had begged for it. Only one request did she make, and this she pleaded regretfully, knowing how long it had taken him to make himself a home and a practice here. It was that he would not settle at The Priory, or near Hohve at all—yet. Very humbly and wistfully she entreated this, calling herself exacting and selfish, and begging him to forgive her for always being a hindrance to him in his good works.

But he told her, kissing her pleading eyes, that he should be as happy in one spot as another *with his wife*; and that The Priory should be let until she really wished to come back. He too, he added, with one of his rare, long sighs, should, for a time at least, work better anywhere than here. The place would be a haunted place for them both—just yet. They would go to London, if she liked that plan.

"To London!" she echoed, a faint smile struggling to her lips—"oh! how good you are to me, Athol!—facing poverty, and beginning your life's work again, all for my whims!"

"And my own advantage, darling," he answered, gently. "Do you forget how Lucilla used to say I never could expect to prosper until I set myself up in style in London!"

"I remember," smiled Lorraine. "I wish Lucy were as eager for the prospect now as she was then."

"I do not," said Athol, promptly. "I would not change her back again to her old self; and, my darling, we shall not be taking her anywhere against her will, be sure of that. Miss Shefford and she stay

together at The Cottage. Now let us draw up my advertisement for a practice."

It was while they were composing this, and when it had led Athol to recall his old professional visits to Hampton House, that a remembrance suddenly flashed across his mind of that clause in the late Mrs. Farrissey's will, which was not to be carried into effect until either himself or Lorraine was engaged to be married. He started to his feet, remembering that he ought to have written or gone to Mr. Lucas at once to tell of their engagement to each other.

That day he went to London, and when he returned he had news to tell Lorraine which filled her with surprise as well as gratitude. Mrs. Farrissey had bequeathed her house, furnished as it was, with property equivalent to the income upon which she had herself maintained it, to Athol Vere, if, when he informed Mr. Lucas of his marriage, it was to be to her youngest niece, Lorraine Gaveston. But if he announced his intention of marrying elsewhere the property was to be divided equally among all her relatives.

This clause in the old lady's will, with Mr. Lucas's trust relating to it, Athol told with much amusement; but below this his earnest gratitude was evident enough.

Lorraine, with the beautiful blush of old, listened to these plans which her aunt had made for her so many years ago while she was a restless, wayward child.

"Are you glad, my dearest?" Athol whispered, seeing this look in her face, which recalled the brilliant beauty of old days.

"Very, very glad," she answered, tears rising slowly to her eyes. "Glad she was fond of you; glad she thought so kindly of me, even then, as to—to wish you to take care of me. Glad you have not now a home to make for yourself by ceaseless work. Glad we are going there. Glad of everything but one, Athol."

"I know it, dear one; but you will come back to be near your father presently, and he will come to us. We have been talking it over quite cheerfully, out in the garden, where we met him."

"We?" questioned Lorraine.

"Yes; Lucy walked with me. She is coming in to you as soon as ever I admit

her. She is dawdling in the garden with Mr. Gaveston."

"I will go to them," Lorraine said. "I am no invalid now, Athol."

That night, when Dr. Vere and his had left Rupert's Rest, Lorraine and father lingered together more silently usual, though, as usual, unwilling to rate; the time seemed so near now for longer separation! For Athol had decided to take her abroad after their marriage thorough change of air and scene, he would be good for her.

"Lorraine, my child," her father said as she sat on a low seat beside his chair, and laid her head upon his. "would it make your going pleasant if you knew it would not be lonely for here?"

"Oh father, so much pleasanter, so easier," she cried, with a quick, hope which had never quite shaped to her before.

"Then, dear, don't fret for me," he smiled into her eyes. "Can you why?"

"I can guess! I can guess!" cried Lorraine, with her old childish excitement ready sympathy. "Lucilla is coming to take my place. I mean, better than she is coming to be mistress here father, I'm so glad!"

A great pleasure brightened his features.

"Will Athol too be glad?" he said.

"Oh! delighted!" cried Lorraine, thorough confidence. "Father, I am Lucilla is so good now, so true and steady and unselfish! We never guessed what goodness was hidden in her nature did we?"

Mr. Gaveston laughed. He was inclined to doubt if the goodness *had* there until the girl had been taught a bitter lesson; but he would not say even to Lorraine.

"She is good, as you say," he answered warmly. "I hope she will be happy. I am growing an old man now, but I do my best to make her so; and she make the old house into home again, could never have been without you child."

So that night Lorraine's chief source of regret was taken away; and at The Cottage Athol too was rejoicing with all his heart over his sister's happiness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was in the resting twilight-time of an August evening that Lorraine walked alone to The Narrows to bid good-bye to Abram Bartle. She had postponed her visit until evening, knowing that he would be riding in the harvest-fields all day, but she was even then too soon.

Tea was laid in the long parlor, but Abram's chair was vacant. Lorraine went to speak to Judith, then laid aside her walking things and sat down at the window, watching for the old man's return. His favorite arm-chair—which, as long as she could remember this room at all, had stood in that window which overlooked the bridle road to Hohve—had been taken away. Never now did she see Abram's cheery face looking out from that snug nook at the window where the clematis clustered; and she understood this all too well.

Mrs. Whinnipeg came in and drew the table nearer the open windows, but did not attempt to put the chair back in that favorite corner. Again and again she brought in additions to the tea, lingering each time for a few minutes' chat; but Lorraine had sat watching for an hour before Abram himself returned, with a tired look upon his patient, brown face.

In the first instant, when he had caught sight of the quiet black-robed figure in that corner of the window where Rourke used to stand, he had started and grown white as death; but in the next, recognizing her, he held out both his hands, and kissed her just as he used to kiss her when she was a child.

"I—I was taken by surprise, my dear," he said; "I didn't expect to see you—just there."

"This is more my place, is it not, Mr. Bartle?" the girl asked, as cheerfully as she could, while she took her seat before the tea-tray. "I can remember when to

sit here and pour out your tea was the highest bliss the world held for me."

"Old Abry was a more cheerful companion in those days, Gipsy," he said, taking his own seat beside her with the patient quietness which was growing familiar to her now—so familiar that she fancied it must have belonged to him, even with all his cheerfulness, in old times—as perhaps it did. "It is different now, my dear. Hard as I try not to be for ever remembering it, it *will* come uppermost; every day—almost every hour of every day, I miss him. It is an ungrateful thing for an old man to say who is himself so near the end of his working day, but I shall miss him just the same to the end. I loved him strangely, Gipsy. You don't mind my saying it—you've told me so—I never loved any other as I loved him."

"I like to hear you say it," the girl answered, very low. "I like to hear you talk of him—only you—yet."

"It's another ungrateful thing to say," resumed the old man, thoughtfully, "but I thought his life was just beginning then. Beginning with power and wealth and influence at his command at last; and he just the one to enjoy all this. He had never had it before; the power and wealth and influence given *him* were nothing but an insult to his father's son, though he never complained—not he—for all his natural contempt for the man—ay, and the woman too, *I* say, though her name was Trenham—who had followed the old squire's steps, and finished the mean wrong he began."

"Every hour of every day we miss Rourke too," said Lorraine, as she laid her soft little fingers on the old man's hard, brown hand.

She had wished to change his mood, but this was all that she could say of Rourke; and so she began to talk of other things, and weaned his thoughts at last from this ever-haunting one. She told him particulars of her father's approaching marriage; particulars which delighted the old farmer, and brought back his pleasant, genial smile. Then she told him how her maid, Joan, too was preparing for her marriage with Brent, and over this he laughed almost gaily.

"So I thought—so I thought," he said.
 "We always foretold that wedding."

Lorraine nodded brightly.

"So did I, Mr. Bartle; for if *ever* a girl fell in love at first sight—"

"*She* did, you mean?" put in Abram, when Lorraine paused suddenly and rather unaccountably—"I see. Why, my dear, I do declare, the roses are coming back, faint and pale, but they are coming. What a long time they are in settling back in their old quarters! I—I do not like this delicate tint," he added, as he gently stroked her smooth cheek. "I want the Gipsy face again, with the old color, that was warm and rich, like the far-down brightness in my boy's eyes. Now both are— How shall we call back the roses, dear?" he asked, checking himself again. "Will the doctor bring them?"

"Yes," she answered, softly.

"Yes, yes, he will bring them," the old man murmured. "No one but he now. God bless him for a true, tried friend to— to all of us."

"When will you come to see us first, Mr. Bartle?" asked Lorraine, in her low, wooing voice; "us and little Rourke?"

He shook his head slowly.

"I must wait till you come back, Gipsy. I have paid my last visit. I'm too old to leave my chimney-corner now—too old and tired. Home is the best place for me, my dear; and besides that, I have not done my work here. I have Rourke's farm to see after, and this one to leave ready for Rourke's boy. Both of them will be his—both will reach the right hands at last. Hohve and Winterfield—both Rourke Trenham's then. He may be a great man yet—a good man too. Ah! his father knew well to whose care to leave him. Let his training and his teaching be all different from his father's, Gipsy; as widely different as heaven from earth. Teach him to bear nobly—and *humbly*—the name we love. God's blessing on it."

The tears were falling from the girl's eyes, and she had put up her hand to hide them when Athol came to fetch her. Not that he took her home then, or for hours afterwards.

Mr. Gaveston, tired of looking for them,

and growing anxious about Lorraine, sent the carriage in haste to the farm, and surprised the three as they sat chatting brightly and lovingly in the sweet, calm, harvest moonlight.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NEXT morning Lorraine went with her father to London, where, in a few days' time, Athol and she were wed.

While they were abroad Miss Shefford and Lucilla kept house for them, Mr. Gaveston having gone back alone; but on their return there was another wedding from the old London house; and Mr. Gaveston took his wife home to be as happy a mistress as had ever reigned at Rupert's Rest.

And now Athol Vere begins his earnest work once more, and Lorraine is ever his bright helper, his cherished companion, his *love* now, even a hundredfold more deeply than in the old time. She has not lost the look of delicacy which her face had never known until that dreary March day when Rourke returned from London; yet she has won even a greater loveliness than her girlhood knew. But it is not for her beauty that tired eyes brighten at her coming; that aching ears listen for her tread; that dying hands seek hers for rest; and worn hearts lean upon her in a trust that never fails and never is deceived.

Athol, with all his intense and fostering tenderness, cannot bring back that old radiant look of health; and he watches her with a nameless anxiety. But he knows that she has crowned her own life with peace; has filled his heart with full and perfect content; and made their life together blest beyond all words.

Often and often do they speak in tender, softened tones of one whom—worthy or unworthy—both have loved with an unfading love; and the very name of his father—a father in heaven whom he can but vaguely yet distinguish from the Father to whom he whispers, "Hallowed be Thy name"—is made precious and beautiful, even now, to little Rourke. Long, sweet stories of his unremembered father and

mother are told to the child, as he sits in the arms of another mother in the twilight or the firelight; stories that will come back to him in after-years, and crown the teaching which is always so gentle and imperceptible.

Encircled by as close a care—aye, and as full a love—as the baby-girl who lisps “Father” and “Mother,” and knows no meaning for the words save Athol’s close caress and Lorraine’s kiss and smile—little Rourke is happy beyond words in this loving home. And Lorraine and Athol love to picture the life before him, fancying how he will, as Abram had said, bear nobly and humbly the name they love. They see him with his father’s eyes, but no unsatisfied desires sadden them. They see him with his father’s face, but no restless passions stir it. They see him with his father’s nature, but no dark places linger there; for the warm, sweet influence of loving sympathy has brightened all.

One month at least in every year is the little squire to spend among his people; to keep quite close and firm, as Athol says, the tie between them. And wherever he goes, Brent—faithful, watchful, and devoted—goes too; for no temptation could induce him to lose sight of his little master, even for one day. So Joan—from the London house, which she will never leave until her mistress leaves it—enjoys now and then the opportunity of sending a letter such as she used to delight in writing; only now the words are all from her heart, and all rightly spelled, and the large *Joan Brent* is affixed with a pride which grows greater year by year. Do not two such honest, steadfast, simple natures, if once united, always draw closer and closer together as life goes on?

It is one of the early days of this present year, that during a visit that little Rourke is paying to his godfather at The Narro-way—there comes this letter to Lorraine; its frequent blots and smears making the cramped and unfamiliar writing scarcely readable.

“DEAR ~~MRS. LORRAINE~~ MRS. VERE,

“Please excuse my writing, but I don’t know what to do. I wish you could come—I could tell you about it all so much bet-

ter. Last night, when I thought it time for Master Rourke to go to bed, I went into the parlor myself to fetch him. I did not care for the nurse to go, and Mr. Brent had been sent for to Holve. When I went in he was on Mr. Bartle’s knee, and the master bid me sit down and wait a few minutes. He was talking soft-like to the child, and I’m sure there were tears in his eyes, though I did not like to seem to see. He asked me at first what time it was, but I could not tell, because the old clock had run itself down that morning, and I had taken it away. When I told him so, he smiled, and said, ‘We will be a little later to-night, then, Rourke—Rourke, dear lad.’ I fancied, by that, that he just forgot who he was talking to, but presently he went on speaking to the child of his father—soft and quiet though, and more to himself than anyone else, just as if he saw it all. He told how Mr. Trenham used to throw his stick up into the air when he reached a certain spot, to show that he was coming. He showed where he used to stand by the window where the clematis is before he said good-bye, as if he did not like *good-bye*. He told how the dogs used to rush out to meet him, and how the horses knew his voice, and how he came always like the sunshine or the spring. Then I found out that he was sobbing, and Master Rourke sobbed too, and then—I could not help it—I sobbed too. I felt that I ought to have prevented his talking to make him cry, but how could I? I never saw him cry before, and oh! it was sad to see!

“At last, quite quietly, he fell asleep, and I took Master Rourke out of his arms and carried him to bed. When I went back and looked into the parlor, master was sitting still as I had left him in his big chair, and the old sheep-dog had his head on master’s knee, and his eyes upon his face, and was moaning softly. And then I saw the truth at once—he was dead. I seemed to know it the moment I looked at him, though his face was as full of rest as it had ever been when he had fallen asleep in that chair before; and there was not a sign of ache or suffering. I know you will hear of this, ma’am, from Mr. Gaveston, for both he and Mrs. Gaveston came at

once; but I want you or Dr. Vere to come soon. I think you will—because the master always loved you dearly. It is all so miserable now he's gone, till I look at his face; it looks so happy! I could almost fancy I see him as he sometimes used to sit resting at the window when he *knew* Mr. Trenham was on his way to the farm—so satisfied and so content: but I think this look is even happier still.

“Respectfully,

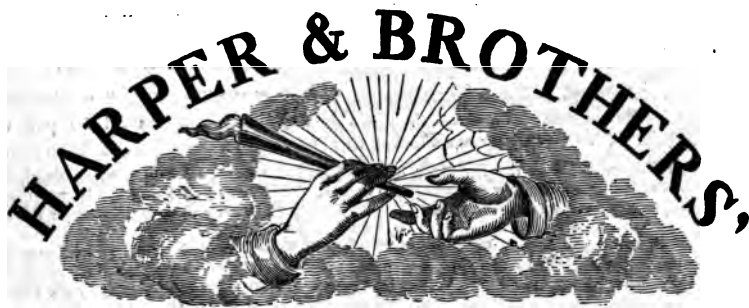
“JUDITH WHINNIPEG.”

Before nightfall Lorraine is looking with misty eyes upon the quiet, sleeping face which she has loved for all her life; and Athol—holding against his own the tearful face of Rourke's child—is wondering, wondering of the life beyond this sleep; the life which Abram and his “boy” have reached; the life whose secrets he, with all his knowledge, cannot touch.



THE END.

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